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AUGUST 1931

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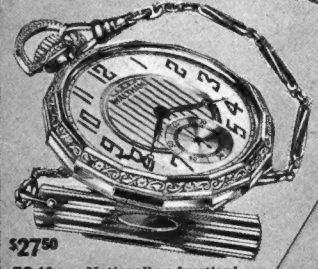

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Ed snickered.

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They both laughed uproariously. And probably it did seem like a joke to them that a $30 a week clerk would have the nerve to think he could get anywhere or make real money without some special "gift" or "pull."

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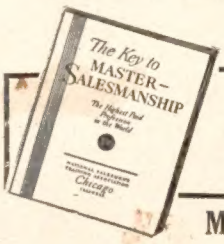

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Monthly publication issued by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary. Copyright, 1931, by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., New York. Copyright, 1931, by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., Great Britain. Entered as Second-class Matter, December 22, 1927, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $2.86. Foreign, $3.22.

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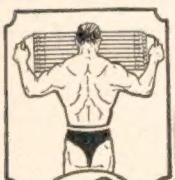

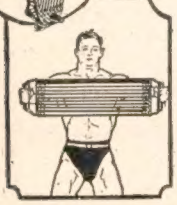

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A Chat With You

IF you want to get even the mildest magazine editor into a ferocious, scornful mood, tell him that fiction is false, that real life is unexciting.

He will tear his hair and lead you by the lapel to his files, and you will bend over them amazed at the data there which proves that real life is full of adventure—adventure so hair-raising at times that it would be unbelievable if put into stories.

Writers, newspaper men, and fiction editors know that the world is pulsing with high adventure. The letters of our readers frequently contain very interesting personal experiences, out in the mountains, plains, deserts, and cities. Authors come back to this city from far places every week. Bronzed, full of strange memories, they spin stories like the tale-tellers of Bagdad.

* * * *

IN the last month and a half, these men sat facing us: one who had returned from the jungles of Panama, where he had hunted tigers, lost a chum in a revolution, boarded a boat that took him hundreds of miles out of his way into unknown parts, lived at a gold mine, and experienced a terrific storm at sea; one who had been in hand-to-hand mortal combat with savage Berbers in the High Atlas in Africa; one who had fought Cossacks in Siberia; one who had mushed behind Alaskan malemutes; one who goes whaling for three months every year; one who rushes to any part of the world where a war is going on, and gets into the thick of it; one who has chased border bandits in planes along the Rio Grande; one who has carried fifty thousand dollars in gold in a speedy automobile in Mexico, and been ambushed by cutthroats on a precipitous mountain road, only to plow through them, reach the town, arouse the rurales, lead them back, aid in the battle, and witness the capture, summary trial, and swift hanging of the marauders! The world is crammed with adventure.

* * * *

EVERYWHERE, the things you read in fiction are duplicated in life. Tombs are unearthed and wondrous things brought to the eyes of modern man, that he may understand the dark days of unknown, unwritten history. Lost cities are being found. Hardy, hopeful men are faring forth in search of buried or sunken treasures. French legionnaires are tramping across the blazing sands. Men armed with rifles and cameras penetrate the jungle lairs of beasts. Ships still battle the gales at Cape Horn.

* * * *

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Slimuel X. Evans, "Dumbest Flyer of the Border Patrol," Guarding a Circus in a Tough Town—Stunt Flying—Grisly Air Duels That Make You Jitter—Tight Suspense, Reckless Adventure, and Laughter—a Large Order for One Novel, but Here It Is, Ready to Read!

CHAPTER I.

I GET IN A MESS.

NOW, little children, all of you be perfectly quiet, while Papa Slim tells you the story of the big donkey with a nose longer than his ears, who fell among the border wolves and how they taught him to be the smartest donkey in the world. Papa Slim knows, because Papa Slim was the donkey.

At this point, any one who knows Papa Slim—otherwise Slim Evans of the army air-service border patrol—will be permitted to leave the room, take firm hold of his left sleeve with the right thumb and forefinger, open it wide, place his mouth close to it and give vent to a hearty cackle.

For Lieutenant Slimuel X. Evans—which name I go under during periods when I am gaining on the sheriff—has become accustomed to being laughed at. In fact, when I am downhearted I go out and laugh at myself.

Nevertheless, pin back your ears, take two drinks and accompany me up the steps of the headquarters building of the McMullen Flight of the border patrol, to which small oven of a building I had just been summoned to answer a long-distance call.

I was sure that it was from a girl in San Antonio, to whom I had carelessly admitted the fact that I expected to receive a hundred thousand dollars within the next month from my uncle, who, as I recall it, I told her was Henry Ford.

Captain Kennard, our stumpy little C. O., was sitting back of his desk in his undershirt, his dusty field boots hiding coyly among the important official papers. He was talking into the phone himself.

"Yeah, he's coming in right now," he was saying. "Everything'll be all right."

"If that's a woman," I told him, "tell her I'm down with a bad attack of dandruff, will you?"

"It's George Groody," Kennard stated in his raucous voice. "Looks like you've got to take a leave."

I grabbed the phone. Groody, who had been stationed at McMullen himself in his army days, proceeded to approach the point by a circuitous route.

"Now, listen carefully," he told me. "In the first place, the Groody Flying Circus is now attached to the White-Waterman Ground Circus. I got shy of dough, so I had to go back to leaping from plane to plane to collect a little."

"Right," I said. "Where are you talking from?"

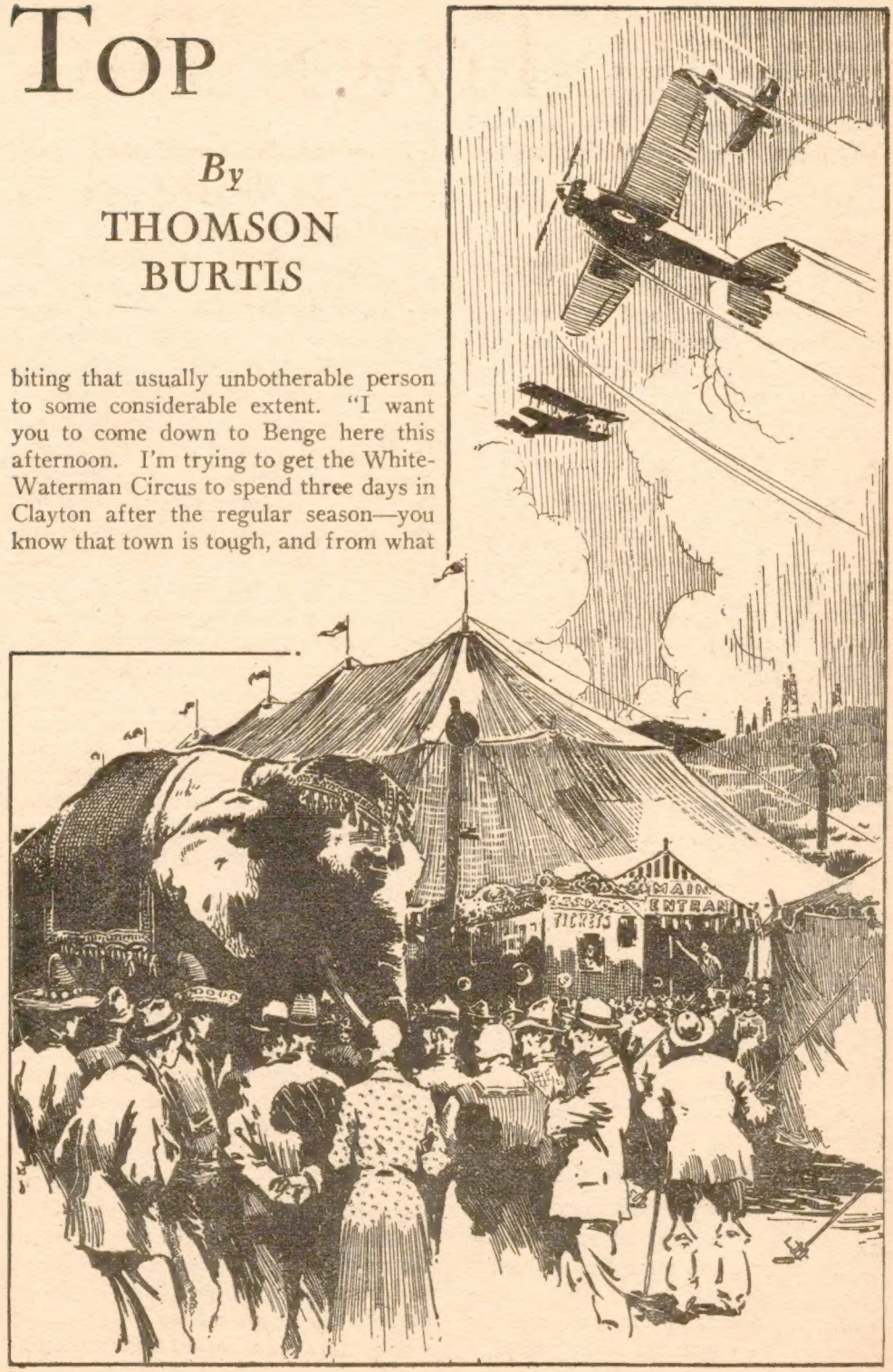
"Benge, Texas, and our next stop is Clayton for Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. In fact, it's the last stop of the season."

"Oho," I said. "Going to play an oil town, huh?"

"Right. Now get this." I gathered, from the way Groody's faint voice came over the wire, that there was something

TOP

By
THOMSON BURTIS



biting that usually unbotherable person to some considerable extent. "I want you to come down to Benge here this afternoon. I'm trying to get the White-Waterman Circus to spend three days in Clayton after the regular season—you know that town is tough, and from what

I gather it's going to be tougher when we arrive. There's a hell of a lot of trouble of some kind afoot. My second pilot went up a thousand feet and dove down eleven hundred this morning. Can't prove it, but I think his plane had been monkeyed with. I want you to come over with a double capacity, so to speak."

"Pilot and bootlegger, I presume," I said, trying to cheer the lad up.

"Bootlegger, pilot and, last but not least, border patrolman! If this outfit gets to Clayton, they'll certainly need a limb of the law up their sleeve."

"Did you talk to the cap about it?" I asked him.

"Yeah," said Groody.

"Then, my lad, I accept your kind invitation with many thanks," I told George as I felt a new thrill of life along my keel.

Groody's voice went on: "There's a chance we may not get to Clayton, though I'm pushing for it all I can, as I'm as flat as a snake on a pane of glass. Three days among that boom-town bunch, with all the money they've got to spend, will fix up the Groody bank account if in the process it doesn't break the Groody neck."

"What in hell's up?" I demanded. Groody wasn't the sort to dramatize things, and his voice was in deadly earnest as it came through the phone.

"Listen," Groody said, "these telephone calls cost money, which at the present I haven't got. The quicker you get here to Benge, the quicker you'll know."

"I'm halfway there already, son," I told him.

JUST flying patrol for three hours every day across the mesquite had been getting sort of monotonous. The rustlers and smugglers seemed to have taken to their holes during the hot weather, and nothing had happened for weeks to jolt a man out of his sleep.

As I hung up the phone the thought crossed my mind that Clayton, besides being the wildest town on the border, was also known as a smuggling headquarters.

I fixed Captain Kennard with a bright and glittering eye.

"How about taking the Fokker?" I asked weightily.

After a couple of years' effort, the border-patrol flights had persuaded the big shots—who did their flying either in their desk chairs or around airdromes in a dignified manner—to send us a couple of single seaters just to relieve the monotony of tugging ton-and-a-half De Havilands up and down the border. You weren't even supposed to stunt the D. H.'s. However, with the two single-seaters a man was able to go up and hang on his back in the clouds once in a while, if he felt festive.

"If you're going to maintain law and order, you're going to need guns," Kennard stated. "Aren't you going over there prepared to die for the dear old Groody Flying Circus?"

"Not by a damn sight," I told him. "Nevertheless and notwithstanding, the guns were rigged up on the Fokker this very morning, and with that crate I can play around the tents of that circus like a leaping flea!"

"O. K.," Kennard grinned. He was the best commanding officer on the border, and the scars of no less than twenty-three airplane wrecks showed on his battered pan. "Damned if this patrol isn't getting to be a private fraternity," he stated. "The government has certainly paid a lot of bills to get the ex-members of it out of trouble. So beat it with my blessings."

"With pleasure," I told him, and set about preparations for my departure.

While I'm flinging my feet freely to the right and left, ordering the ship out and inserting tooth brush and shaving kit into my musette bag, you might as well get a look at me so that you'll un-

derstand some of the things which shortly came to pass. You won't take me any more seriously than the enemy did—or I do myself—after you've inspected me.

In the first place, I am six feet six inches tall. I am built approximately like a giraffe, if a giraffe only had two legs and they were as long as his neck. I even look somewhat like that animal except that my nose is a trifle larger. That song, "The Nose of the Rio Grande," was written about me. I never dress up because it makes me look worse. I have never been exposed to the refinements of genteel society, because I rose from cook in a cow camp in Utah to cow-puncher and thence to the army air service.

Lest you wonder why I, in 1917, got into it at all, I will let you in on the secret. In those days, a candidate for the flying corps was supposed to be a combination of Hercules, Adonis, Einstein, and the Angel Gabriel. You had to have a college degree, eyes that could tell whether a flea was washing its face or merely resting on the top of the Statue of Liberty, and ears that could hear a pin drop in the next county.

However, there was a black sheep in our family tree who ended up as a senator, and he got me into the air service with considerable glee. Flying was supposed to be suicide in those days, and he figured that if an airplane didn't get me, a bullet must.

Consequently, you behold a human string bean, folding himself into a little single-seated, dun-colored Fokker, the bar of a first lieutenant of the air service on the open collar of his sweat-stained khaki shirt, and a pair of goggles mercifully hiding half of his face.

Beneath the prodigious proboscis (big nose) which jutted forth from the goggles, you might note an extra wide mouth which the healing of a cut pulled down on one side, and a peculiar and variegated jaw. It has traces of the bulldog variety with a cross strain of lantern, and its contour is such it seems as though it couldn't make up its mind whether to be round or square.

There was a little kick, at that, in taking off the feathery little Fokker, and to be conscious of its steel-tubing construction instead of the frail De Haviland make-up, and to listen to the lullaby of the six-cylinder Mercedes motor instead of the bull-like roar of a twelve-cylinder Liberty.

I TOOK out straight over the mesquite for Benge, which was fifty miles from the border and about one hundred and fifty miles from McMullen. It would have been more sensible to fly down the Rio Grande and stay over what few clearings there were, but I was fanning and fogging to get to Groody and the White-Waterman Circus.

I had spent some time around tent shows twice before with Groody, and I loved the life. I felt like a veteran of the circus lot. In fact, caballeros, as the Fokker eased through the ether at the cool altitude of a mile and one half, there was very little in life that I didn't think I knew a lot about.

Musing pleasantly on three days with the circus in an oil-boom town, salting the prospect with the thought of getting boiled with Groody, and peppering it with the knowledge that excitement might be in the offing, I was doing very well by myself when I picked up a speck in the sky ahead of me.

A moment later, I realized that it was an airplane, flying toward me from the west. Had it been coming up from the south I might have kidded myself into thinking that it was carrying contraband. Under the conditions, however, forty miles from the border, I looked at it with only the mildest interest. Then I thought that it might be Groody himself in one of his planes, so I sat up and started to pay attention.

With the Fokker making one hundred and ten miles an hour and the other ship not losing any time, the two of us moved nearer at a high rate of speed. Within a minute I could make out its outlines enough to see that it was a modern Beed two-seat monoplane. It was splitting the breezes fluently.

"Maybe Groody's got himself some new planes," I thought, and as the radial-motored monoplane got within two hundred yards of me, I strained my eyes at its two occupants in an endeavor to recognize the genial George.

The monoplane was two hundred yards to my left, and as it came even with me I saw the short man in the rear seat clutch his huge pilot—who was not Groody—and gesture to him. I waved a greeting and the air stream caught my arm and damn near broke it.

By this time, I was past them, of course, but I continued to look as the monoplane arched upward and fell off gracefully to its left in a wing turn. An instant later, it was flying in the same direction I was, about one hundred yards to my left and perhaps fifty feet higher than I.

"Maybe Groody sent out an escort plane to guide me to Benge," I thought in some astonishment.

The next minute I realized that that couldn't be the truth. Bob Corrigan, Groody's other flyer, was also an ex-McMullenite, and that huge pilot was not Corrigan.

The monoplane overhauled me rapidly. I don't know why, but I took a quick look at its nose to see whether it had guns on.

It hadn't.

Because it seemed silly for it to turn around and start after me, I never took my eyes away from it. In a moment it was alongside me, the two motionless, helmeted figures just looking at me. The pilot throttled down a trifle until we were going at the same speed. He looked back at his passenger, as though for orders. I was very tense, somehow, as if I expected something.

The next second I got it. The man in the back seat unbuttoned the full-length coveralls he had on and thrust one hand inside. Suddenly he moved like lightning and in that right hand of his was a submachine gun.

I WAS so completely stunned that what I did I did without conscious thought. If I had been in a cumbersome DeHaviland a machine-gun bullet would have punched the last period in the memoirs of Lieutenant Slimuel X. Evans there and then.

Instinctively I jammed the stick forward and to the left and kicked on left rudder in the same motion. Like a flash, the little Fokker answered. As it darted downward and to the left, half a dozen neat bullet holes appeared in the tip of the upflung right wing. A second later, I was directly underneath the Beed, diving for my life with wide-open motor. Hunched down in my cockpit, my whole body ablaze with such fury as only fear can cause, I looked back up at the Beed.

It wasn't following me down. For the moment, directly underneath it and now almost a thousand feet lower, I was safe. Even in my condition—a mixture of consuming rage and stunned disbelief at the evidence of my own eyes—I found time to congratulate myself for instinctively doing the only thing that could have saved my life. If I had dived away from that Beed instead of beneath it, that machine gun could have followed me.

Suddenly, I snapped back to myself. Not that I wasn't still mad, but the red haze disappeared from my eyes and my heart quit pounding a little.

"Those guys are going to pluck a whisker or two from St. Peter's beard themselves now!" I said.

It never occurred to me to wonder why the Beed was flying along straight

and level with no attempt to complete the job it had started. I didn't have room for any speculations about why a ship should materialize out of the sky, meet me, and try to kill me. All I knew was that I was going to make that handsome airplane a sieve and ventilate those two murderers with a thoroughness born of love for my art.

And so, keeping a wary eye on the other ship, I zoomed the Fokker five hundred feet with the excess speed of the dive. I was three hundred feet below the Beed, still staying directly underneath it, when suddenly it banked.

There I made my move. The pilot seemed to be gesticulating, but that would do him no good now. I pulled the nose of the Fokker up until it was standing on its tail, while I bent down behind the cowling and squinted along my guns. The tracers went behind the tail of the Beed. I got my nose over slightly and saw my last burst tear through the fuselage. Then I had to level out as the Beed started down in a steep spiral. I shot the Fokker underneath it once more. The monoplane didn't have nose guns, so my position, now two hundred feet lower than the bigger ship, was not as perilous as it might have been.

Now it was but one hundred feet above me, and as it cocked up in a left bank, I skidded the Fokker to the right until I was behind it. I shot upward in a climbing turn to the left and once again my guns spoke. I missed. The tracers went above the ship, and before I could get my sights on it, it had roared past me and I had almost stalled again.

I leveled off, and banked quickly to the left until I was pointed toward him. It was on the same level with me now, circling around me. I, at the center of the circle, kept my nose toward it. My radiator and motor would be a shield against——

I was just about to clamp down on the gun control on my stick when something caused me to hesitate. That huge pilot in the front seat had both hands in the air and was flinging them around as though he had the St. Vitus dance. He was pointing at the man in the rear seat, pointing at himself, and shaking his head. Then I noticed a remarkable phenomenon.

WITH those two motors roaring and with me still steaming in a fog as a result of what had happened, my brain was none too nimble at the moment, or I would have noticed it before. The squat man in the rear seat was slumped over the side of the cockpit toward me. Flying that inner circle, my guns constantly trained on the Beed, I saw the pilot reach over, grasp the machine gun, and fling it out of the ship.

The machine gunner's inert body slumped still more as the pilot got the gun.

"He's dead," I told myself stupidly. And I was absolutely certain that no bullet of mine had killed him.

Then, encouraged by the fact that I was holding my fire, the big pilot held up a pistol, pointed it at the back seat man significantly, and then at himself. As to wipe any thoughts of a murderous nature out of my mind, he then tossed the pistol over the side of the ship.

All this took place in less than a minute, I presume, but it certainly seemed like a year to me. I've gone through plenty of strange seconds in my time, but this, rising up and smacking me in the face with no warning, will remain in my memory to my dying day.

By this time, I was as close to normal as I ever get, and my mind was working on all one cylinder. It took me no time at all to make up my mind. I slid up alongside that Beed, pointed west, and patted my guns significantly. I desired to hold converse with that be-goggled pilot.

He seemed to understand my intentions thoroughly. He swung his ship promptly and I perched the Fokker fifty feet behind him and fifty feet above him. Our two-ship cavalcade slid through the cerulean in the general direction of Benge and the Pacific Ocean.

Fifteen miles ahead, plainly discernible in the golden November air, was a little patch of open fields, and I had hopes that there would be one we could land on. I had ten minutes to get myself in focus as it were, and the more I thought the more I was uncertain as to whether I was asleep or awake. The whole thing just couldn't be true—and yet it was.

"There's no use trying to figure it out," I told myself.

I tried to keep my mind off the subject because it made me so damn mad. By the time I had spotted a long, narrow, stubble field, which looked as if it had been recently cut, I was fit to be tied again. Regardless of that corpse in the back seat of the Beed, that pilot had better have a pretty good story.

There was a shack at one edge of the clearing—which was made up of five fields of assorted sizes—but it seemed to be deserted. It probably was used by some Mexican or other during the summer months, who left it after his crops were cut.

The pilot obeyed my signals without a murmur, spiraled his ship down and landed it with accomplished skill. I stayed in the air, roaring past him and motioning him to get out of his ship before I landed. This he did and only then did I sideslip the sturdy little single-seater down over the mesquite, land, and taxi toward the giant of a man who stood awaiting me restlessly. He was smoking a cigarette so fast that a continuous stream of smoke came from his mouth.

I had my trusty Colt out, and his hands, without orders from me, were in the air as I hopped out of the ship.

"Don't shoot—I surrender!" he shouted in a voice that would make a foghorn sound like a tin whistle, and there was a sort of chuckle in it.

I didn't do a bit of talking as I walked slowly toward him.

Just to complete the goofiness of the whole episode, his battered face was all screwed up in a grin that put a thousand furrows in his map. From either side of a nose which had been broken, two rather small gray eyes sparkled like a couple of diamonds in the sun.

"Come on, now, give a guy a break!" he laughed, and his voice and laugh were loud enough to be heard in McMullen. "The way you're sneakin' up on me gives me the creeps!"

"That's too bad," I informed him, the while I sized him up further.

SOMEHOW I could barely help smiling myself as I looked at that good-natured, grinning pan. He was dressed in much-patched and spotted khaki breeches, laced boots that had long since seen their best days, and a flannel shirt, open at the neck. His Irish face was half covered with a stubble of beard, and I noticed that one ear had an infant cauliflower on it. Added to that bashed-in nose and a certain battered look about his grinning face, it gave one the impression that he was probably an ex-prize fighter.

He was at least six feet two, long-legged, burly bodied, and with a pair of shoulders that he would have had to turn sidewise to get through the Arc de Triomphe. There was something shop-worn about his whole appearance, but that grin showed that he was still in there fighting 'em.

"You look as though you don't know whether you're comin' or goin'," he snorted, and fairly doubled up with Rabelaisian laughter that made the limbs of the mesquite trees wave gently.

I wasn't as sore as I had been, but my dander was at about half mast and

the stranger's merriment sort of rubbed my fur the wrong way.

"Go ahead and enjoy yourself," I told him tartly, and he did.

He laughed until he was weak. He sneezed, snorted, bellowed, and brayed. He finally collapsed on the grass and every time he seemed about to get over his spasm he'd take another look at me and it would start again. I'll swear I had to take three looks at the Beed to be sure of my right name.

Hanging limply over the side of the cockpit, one side of his head smeared with blood, there was indubitably a corpse. I wasn't completely crazy.

Finally, though, I had to give in to that avalanche of hilarity, corpse or no corpse. Out there under the lowering sun, all alone in the middle of the mesquite, we two miscellaneous monkeys sat and laughed for no reason.

At last it was over. I presume that three quarters of it was caused by the reaction of what we had gone through. He had his helmet off now to show sparse blond hair which barely covered his scalp. It was slightly curly and untidy. He was a sort of messy, cocky, bedraggled, overgrown mongrel who had been kicked around a lot but still looked at the world with bright eyes.

Then my eyes fell on the Fokker with those nice little bullet holes in it, and as I came back to myself, my angry curiosity washed back over me.

"What the hell is so funny?" I demanded.

A brief shout made a fleecy cloud above us partly disintegrate.

"You looked so damn mad, sneaking up on me with that popgun, that I couldn't help it," he said in lower tones.

"If I'd got killed, it would've been a riot!" I observed. "All right, mister. Who are you and what does all this mean?"

He sobered instantly and those small, merry eyes suddenly became like gimlets as they bored into mine.

"You're Slim Evans of McMullen, aren't you?" he encountered.

"Yeah," I said suspiciously. "From that machine gun, I suspected somebody knew me."

"I didn't until just now, believe it or not," he stated. "But I've heard about you and there couldn't be anybody else as tall as you. My name is Becker—Phineas Becker."

It may sound crazy, but I relaxed a trifle. How are you going to be scared of a man named Phineas?

"All right, Becker, speak your piece."

"All right," came that bull-like voice, and his eyes never wavered. "You may not believe it, but it's the truth. Three days ago in Clayton—an oil-boom town down on the border—I join on with a fellow named Harrington who's got three ships down there. He uses them to take people for rides and to fly oil men around that have to get somewhere in a hurry. About an hour and a half ago, this mug"—and he jerked his thumb, which had been broken, toward the deceased gentleman—"that I nor nobody else had ever seen before, arrives at the field in a hurry and says he wants to fly to McMullen.

"He says to fly north to Benge and then start for McMullen because there's just a chance the man he wants to see will be flyin' to Benge himself, and in that case he wouldn't have to go all the way, but can join him in Benge. So that's just what I do, and then this guy pulls out the machine gun, that I didn't know he had, and starts to operate on you. So I killed him and my cheeks are still red with pinchin' at the fact that you didn't bump me off before you knew what you were doin'."

WELL, brothers, that straightforward story with the evidence in the back cockpit struck me all of a heap. One thing stood out like a seidel of beer in the Sahara Desert. This dead bozo had

known that I was flying from McMullen to Benge, and I hadn't known it myself until Groody had told me almost precisely an hour and three quarters ago!

I got to my feet as though a spring had suddenly been released under me.

"Let's see who your boy friend is," I said, and led the way toward the Beed.

We lifted the short, fat body out of the plane, and Becker observed chattily:

"Pretty, eh? Right in the temple. He must have been surprised. Ho! ho! ho!"

The deceased had thick, oily, black hair, a swarthy skin, and thick lips. His wide-open, stary eyes were a deep, heavy brown, and I closed the heavy lids over them. Then we proceeded to investigate. There was just one piece of paper in his pocket, and, as I looked at it, my eyes widened and my ears flapped gently.

It had been torn off the bottom of a piece of cheap, blue-lined note paper, and the two words I saw were evidently the end of a letter. One was "Gracias," and the signature was "Juan Estobar." The words were scrawled in big characters in pencil.

"You look as though you'd seen a ghost!" roared Becker.

"In a manner of speaking," I said, "I have."

"What's the lay?" he asked quickly.

"A month ago," I told him, "we rounded up a gang of spig smugglers and knocked off the leader. In fact, I did it personally, and this Juan Estobar is supposed to be his brother."

"Do you think Juan Estobar wired this guy to bump you off for revenge?" he asked.

"Looks that way, doesn't it?" I returned abstractedly. "Now let's see if we can find out some more about him."

Underneath the coveralls, this Italian-looking gentleman had on a Palm Beach suit and a gaudy, blue-and-white shirt. I stripped off the coat, and facing me was a Chicago label. His blue shirt, monogrammed with the initials "A. D.," had been bought in Chicago likewise, and so had his shoes.

For a moment, I stared.

"The chances are ten to one," I said slowly, "that this is some gangster imported for this killing. But since when have Mexicans hired American sewer rats to do their dirty work for them?"

Suddenly Becker laughed again.

"Say!" he chortled. "What a pickle I'd've been in if he bumped you off! He'd've turned that gun on me, made me land him in Mexico somewhere, and then bumped *me* off!"

"The chances are, you're right," I agreed. "Question No. 2 before the house is: How could he know I was going to be frolicking through the atmosphere in this neck of the woods at this time?"

"Some confederate in McMullen," suggested Becker.

"But, I didn't know it myself until I got a long-distance call a couple of hours ago. Of course, some one might've got the news in town, but they'd've had to use the long-distance telephone. I can find that out within five minutes after we get to Benge."

Becker nodded.

"You'll probably find a long-distance call between McMullen and Benge. If what you say is the truth, they'd've had to use the phone. There wasn't time for anything else."

"I'm just wondering," I said slowly, "about a lot of things. The fellow I'm going to see in Benge said there was skullduggery afoot. I wonder if these two things tie up——"

"Who are you goin' to see—Groody?" Becker cut in.

There is no way for me to indicate the volume and depth of that human foghorn's bass voice. It fairly shattered your eardrums every time he talked. A stage whisper from him was like the roar of an airplane motor.

"Yeah. How did you know that?"

"He's seein' ghosts again!" roared Becker, slapping his thigh in gusty enjoyment. "It wasn't hard to figure out, when Groody's Flyin' Circus is plastered all over Clayton. And every flyer's heard of that guy when he was in the army."

I nodded.

"I never thought of that. Well, either Groody's Circus or the White-Waterman Circus he's joined are having some trouble of some sort or expecting to have some," I told him. "That's the reason I'm meeting them for their date in Clayton."

FOR a minute Becker sat there and looked at me in a highly peculiar fashion. I never saw eyes with such a hypnotic quality in them. They were like a pair of X rays photographing my mind.

"Listen," he bellowed abruptly. "I think they are goin' to have trouble. The more I see of this Harrington outfit that I'm hooked up with, the less I like it. I've got to go to Benge with you anyway and get this corpse off my hands, and a few other things, and I may be able to be of some help to you. I'm lookin' for a job, and I'd like to sign on with Groody. Let's get goin' and have a powwow when we get there. The more I think of it, the more I think that maybe there's somethin' more to this than you and I figure."

"What's on your mind?" I snapped at him.

I was getting restless, walking up and down, trying to get things straight in my mind.

"Why tell it twice?" he roared. "Let's put the corpse's trousseau back on and hop to it, eh?"

This we did. Just before he climbed in his plane, Phineas Becker grinned that irresistible grin.

"I suppose you'll stick behind me," he chortled. "But don't get funny with your guns, will you? You look right peevish to me!"

I was, in a way, but after the air cleaned the cobwebs out of my mind and the flourishing cattle town of Benge came into view, I felt better.

CHAPTER II.
BATTLE.

AN hour and a half later, as the crow flies, Mr. Phineas Becker, Mr. George Groody, and I were planting our feet on the White-Waterman circus lot. Phineas and I had spotted one of Groody's ships in a field about a mile and a half from the lot, landed there, been greeted by Groody, and had then found ourselves the center of a swirling mess because of the corpse.

I was a border patrolman, however, and that fact, plus the holes in the Fokker's wing and other odd items, finally provided evidence enough so that after a few reports, interrogations, accusations, and explanations, we were, in a manner of speaking, out of the hands of the law.

However, there had been no opportunity for the hawk-faced Groody to give me any information whatever, as to what was up. It was shortly after five and the matinée was just letting out. The midway was a mass of slowly moving people.

Out of front of the side show, an elderly gentleman with a voice almost as loud as Becker's was spieling eloquently in an endeavor to net any poor fish that had been so unfortunate as not to have seen the most remarkable collection of freaks in the world.

A hundred yards to the right of the midway was the cook tent. The flag was up, which meant that supper was ready.

"Let's go over to the stake-and-chain wagon before we have supper," Groody suggested. "I can give you a drink there."

While we are skirting around back of the side show and around the big top to the stake-and-chain wagon, have a look at Groody. He was over six feet tall, very loose jointed. Above his spare body, which incidentally was made of steel and rawhide, a lean face made him look like a sardonic eagle of a man. His long narrow, sloping eyes were like two brightly polished lines of steel.

His curving nose jutted forth boldly, and below its thin nostrils he had a big, saturnine-looking mouth. Part of this effect was caused by the fact that the wrinkles which ran from his nostrils to his mouth were far from symmetrical. One of them had evidently started out with the idea of reaching the left-hand corner of his lips, abandoned that intention for a daring exploration out into his thin cheek, and then, becoming frightened, had ducked back around his mouth again.

When Groody's lips widened in his peculiarly individual smile, that wrinkle deepened to a furrow and it made him look like some mocking *Mephistopheles.*

He had been a soldier of fortune all over the world and, in my opinion, was the greatest flyer the American army ever had. He had fewer nerves than a petrified turtle, and could turn from fighting some big business battle in the oil fields, to leaping lightly from ship to ship in midair if it was necessary. He couldn't be bullied and he couldn't be bluffed—remember that, because it has an important bearing on what was to come.

"Tom Service will fairly gibber with joy when he hears about what happened," Groody stated, removing his long, thin, black cigar from his mouth. Mr. Thomas Service, ex-secret-service man, and Groody's inseparable side-kick, was in town attending to some business. He was acting as manager of the Groody Flying Circus.

"You say he used to be a secret-service man?" Becker inquired. He was gazing around the crowded lot, its ornate wagons scattered around in apparent confusion but actually according to a set system.

"And one of the best," Groody nodded.

"In fact," I told Becker as we approached the stake-and-chain wagon, "on three different occasions, Tom Service and Groody have joined circuses as detectives as well as flyers."

"I see," nodded Becker. He jerked his crooked thumb at an eight-foot canvas wall which fenced off a considerable area behind the big top and its menagerie tent. "What's that for?" he inquired.

"That's the back yard," Groody explained, "where the performers, animals, et cetera, get ready for their appearance in the ring. That tent in the rear is the pad room—dressing rooms for men and women on each end, and the ring stock in the middle."

"Good horses are hard to get these days," roared Phineas Becker. "Ho! ho! ho!"

"And this," I stated as we approached a brightly painted closed wagon against which a canvas lean-to had been set, "is the stake-and-chain wagon. They call it that because it carries the stakes for the show. During the day, it's sort of headquarters for the bosses."

A HALF dozen folding canvas chairs were scattered around underneath the lean-to. There were milk cans of ice water, a bench with wash basins, soap and towels, a mirror hung against the wall of the wagon, and even talcum powder. Farther on, behind the big top, the horse tents were already being torn down, as well as the blacksmith tent. The sun was down, so the hundred-odd massive, dapple-gray horses needed the tent shelter no longer.

"There's nobody around, apparently," Groody observed, "but they'll be here

any minute. I want you to meet the two bosses before we eat supper."

"Hello! What's that?" I said suddenly.

I had heard the low, snarling drone of an airplane motor.

"Corrigan didn't plan to come back," George Groody stated.

"There he is," Becker said, pointing south. "And it's one of Harrington's ships!"

"That's your outfit from Clayton, isn't it, Becker?" I asked.

He nodded. "I told 'em over the phone that I was all right but wouldn't be in until to-morrow," he bellowed. "Maybe he's got another pilot with him, and they're goin' to fly the ship back."

"Sit down," Groody said, "and I'll get you a drink. Hello, Willie, what's on your mind?"

"Lookin' for Lieutenant Evans," said the stalwart, coal-black Negro. "Telegram just come for him."

"Right here," I said, hopping to my feet. I had left word with the telephone office in town to find out from McMullen about long-distance calls and to wire me the news.

I ripped open the wire and read it aloud:

"The McMullen office reports that no long-distance calls to Clayton, Texas, have been made within the last three days.

"L. D. PERKINS, Manager."

For a moment, there was silence as the three of us stared at each other.

"And you say," Groody said slowly, "that they reported that there had been three dozen calls from Benge to Clayton?"

"Right!" I snapped.

"Well, then," Groody said slowly, "the dead man, whoever he was, got the news of your coming from this end of the line. So far as I know, the only people that had any idea of it were the two owners, White and Sibley, and Tom Service, Bob Corrigan, and myself."

I walked up and down for a minute like an ostrich with a stomach ache.

"He's comin' down right close to us," Becker said suddenly.

I had almost forgotten the airplane overhead. It was spiraling down as though to land in a field about five hundred yards from the circus lot.

"Funny he didn't go on over where the other two ships are," Groody said. "Not that that field isn't all right—although it was too small for *our* purposes."

"Well, here's one cinch," I said. "They're not after Becker's ship. Their objective is the show. After those vague hints you threw out, Becker, have you got any idea about what they may want?"

"Maybe," roared Becker. "But what's the use of talkin'? We'll soon find out. He's side-slippin' in. That means it's Harrington himself flyin'."

"Here's your drink, gents," said Groody. "Triple-distilled corn, good for the eye, ear, nose, and throat, and makes the breath soft and pliable! Likewise, here come the two bosses."

WE tossed off the straight drinks quickly. Becker was inspecting with great interest the two men who were approaching from the back yard, while Groody poured another drink. As for me, I was doing my usual gallop up and down and doing a lot of wondering.

If some spy in McMullen had made a telephone call to Clayton, there would have been some sense in that attempted murder, and the connection with the Mexican bandit wouldn't have seemed so ridiculous. But the idea that Estobar, the bandit, had had a spy in Benge, when I myself had no idea of being within three hundred miles of the place four hours before, was just plumb ridiculous.

I felt in my bones that forces were in motion against me, which I wotted

not the which of, and I was plenty upset. After all, I'd escaped being deliberately murdered by the width of a gnat's whisker, and I do value my neck. 'Tis a poor thing, but it is mine own.

"Gentlemen, meet the owners of our show," said Groody, and proceeded to introduce us.

White was a man of medium height, slenderly built, dressed in ordinary trousers, a vest which was unbuttoned, and a panama hat with the edge turned down all the way around. His white shirt was clean and he had a necktie on. His hatchet face, its long, straight nose jutting out aggressively, was the setting for a pair of steely blue eyes that looked as if they had seen plenty.

His eyebrows were straight, his mouth thin and hard, his jaw narrow, and square, and jutting forward. He was small, but he looked solid; and I was to find out before I left the show that after twenty-five years as an outdoor showman, he was still a bundle of dynamite who could lick his weight in rattlesnakes as well as he could fifteen years ago, when he had been a connection man with the big show.

Sibley was a horse out of another stable. He was big and paunchy with a kindly, fleshy face, white eyebrows and thick, iron-gray hair beneath a large, black sombrero. He was fully accoutered in pants, coat, and weskit, and a large, gold pin embellished his black necktie. He also rejoiced in a flowing gray mustache.

White shook hands with a firm grip, said, "Glad to know you," unsmilingly and scrutinized us both with cold, appraising eyes. There was no nonsense about Mr. White.

"I've just been hearing that you two boys had some trouble and had to kill somebody," Sibley said jovially as he eased his ample bulk into a chair.

"I'll say," nodded Becker. "I'm lucky to be alive myself. You should've seen old Slim here. Ho! ho! ho!"

He slapped his thigh three resounding whacks while he guffawed.

"So I'm standin' there, with my paws in the air and my heart in my mouth, and here comes old Slim, all crouched down, his gun wigglin' around and his face lookin' as though he was plannin' to take a bite out of me! Ho! ho! ho!"

He proceeded to do an imitation of me stalking my prey, punctuating it with laughter so loud that all the "kinkers" (performers) were gathering around curiously. The women were dressed mostly in aprons and the men in flannel shirts and old pants. Before the fluent Phineas had got through his imitation, even White had to laugh. There was something irresistibly breezy about that big, battered, homely-looking guy—a raw vitality that swept you off your feet.

"I needed a good laugh," stated Sibley, sipping that fiery corn as a connoisseur might vintage champagne; "but this ain't gettin' us very far at that. Listen, Lieutenant Evans. Amos White here and Groody—a couple of guys that never know when they're licked—have been trying to persuade me that we ought to play Clayton instead of jumpin' to winter quarters direct from here. They finally claim that with a border patrolman in the town, we won't have no trouble, although we've been threatened with it."

"Yes?" I said surprisedly.

"Right!" the gray-headed old war horse said, slapping a beringed hand down on the arm of his chair. "I reckon it's because maybe the joint keepers figure the show'll take too much money out of town. Lots of towns figure that way. Anyway, it's took two weeks and we just got a license to-day. Furthermore, we've had warnin's to stay out of there—telephone calls and anonymous letters. However, that's nothin' in itself. We get lots of them in this business from people that don't want us around for one reason or another.

Third, though, in addition to all this, I ain't been a showman forty years for nothin'. Them oil towns are filled up with haywire rubes that have got more money than they know what to do with, are wild Indians to start with, and are drunk all the time they ain't workin'. There ain't no such thing as law in a boom town. Even under the best conditions, a show with a half-million-dollar investment takes a hell of a chance going in. There's always likely to be a clem, and when everything's all over you're liable to find your show a wreck!"

A CLEM, I may explain, is show talk for a pitched battle between townsmen and showmen. A real first-class clem is a combination of Donnybrook Fair, the Battle of Verdun, and the Five Points riots, retaining the worst features of each.

"Trouble with you is you're gettin' old, Sam," White said tersely.

"Maybe so," Sibley admitted, "but my age has taught me some sense, too. Now, listen, lieutenant. With all these threats, with the leading lights of the town apparently against us until we did a little bribin', and all the other dynamite there is in playin' a boom town, do you think you, as a border patrolman, swing weight enough down there to stop any trouble?"

"I can always get in the air with machine guns," I stated. "They have a very soothing effect on a mob out for trouble."

"Right," stated Groody. "We've just got to play that town, Mr. Sibley!" Groody said that with so much feeling that I knew then and there that he was in a very tough financial spot. "And I'll be damned if getting a lot of two-for-a-cent threats doesn't make me so sore I'd play it if I knew I was going to lose every airplane I have!" he went on—which was Groody all over.

"Here comes Harrington," Becker whispered so low that they could scarcely hear him in the cook tent. "He's the tall one."

I didn't pay a great deal of attention to the approaching flyers.

"As a matter of fact, Becker here says he knows you're goin' to run into a good deal of trouble," Sibley pointed out, accepting a drink from Groody.

"He can do his talking later," I said. "Why is it so important that you play three or four more days?"

"Just this," White said pushing his hat back on his head. That long, oblong face of his, which seemed to be marked with a thousand scars when inspected at close range, was cold and grim. "This show has had a tough season. Hard times, for one thing; and the drought in the Middle West for another; the miners around West Virginia weren't working; Pacific Coast was only fair. Our overhead is over six thousand a day, and we ain't made it. If we haven't lost fifty thousand bucks net, I'm one of my own elephants. If we get a break in Clayton, we can sit 'em on the grass for six performances from Thursday to Saturday, and get a neat profit of nine grand a performance. It'll bring us even."

"And as for me," stated Groody, "I need money bad. I figure I can put five thousand dollars in my kick with the tie-up I've got with this show during that three days."

"I'd grant all that if everything went right," Sibley protested. "But, listen, boys. Taking everything together, we're sure to run into trouble down there, I figure. To get fifty thousand dollars in Clayton, you're running a chance of losin' a quarter of a million. If them hunyacks ever go wild, and a 'Hey, Rube!' starts, you're liable to have no show left. I don't want to be nasty, but the way I'm thinkin' now, I ain't gonna let the show go down there."

"Mr. Sibley," Groody interjected, "represents the National Circus Corporation. They own several circuses

and fifty-one per cent of this one, so he's got the say."

"Yeah," said White. "If this one loses a measly fifty thousand, it don't mean nothin'. Well, my forty-nine per cent of this show is all I got and I want that fifty thousand and I want to play Clayton, and by Heaven, Sam——"

"Hold your horses, Amos, hold your horses," Sibley said soothingly. "We can fix something up. Let's see what these birds want."

"Hello, Harrington!" Becker was roaring. "Welcome to our city. By careful lyin' I stayed out of jail."

The lights were flickering on all over the lot. At that second, the solitary electric light bulb underneath the canvas canopy glowed into life as the light wagon up near the gate hummed into action. Suddenly the whole lot was a mass of lights.

"So I see," came a rasping voice, and the head of the Harrington Flyers stepped into the illuminated circle.

"I want to see the owners of this show!" he stated in a highly forthright manner.

FOR a moment, there was silence. Every one resented the newcomer's dictatorial attitude, I guess; but he was something to look at anyway in his own right. In the first place, he must have weighed two hundred and twenty pounds, and with his fleshy face, small black mustache and straight-combed black hair, he would have looked more like a middle-aged business man in ordinary clothing, than like a flyer.

It took a second or two to notice that the lightly tanned skin was stretched tight over the flesh of his face and that very likely his weight was in solid meat and not fat. He had turbulent-looking brown eyes with a curious stary quality in them, and heavy black eyebrows that seemed to be in a perpetual frown. Two heavy wrinkles over his short, broad nose seemed to be permanent. He was a stormy and tempestuous-looking character, was Mr. Harrington—a man who apparently wanted what he wanted a split second before he knew he wanted it.

"Right here are both the owners," White said. "What do you want?"

"I want to talk to you alone," Harrington said, those curious brown eyes sweeping over the rest of us with more than a touch of contemptuous annoyance in them.

His companion had stayed back in the shadows—a small man who was smoking a cigarette nonchalantly, his face invisible. He seemed to be giving his exclusive attention to watching the operation of rolling and loading the horse-tent canvas.

"No," Sibley said comfortably. "This here is the board of strategy, so to speak, of the White-Waterman Circus. Anybody coming from Clayton like you must have something important to say, and we've all got to be in on it."

"You'll regret it!" snapped Harrington, his face growing a trifle more ugly.

Suddenly the expansive Sibley proved that he'd been a showman for forty years—which means plenty. Those nomads of the outdoor show world, crisscrossing the country every year, see more tough spots in a month than most people do in a lifetime. It's them against the world, or was until a few years ago, and you don't graduate from that school without learning plenty of lessons by heart.

The old man got to his feet and suddenly his blue eyes were hard and cold.

"Don't be tellin' me what to do, mister!" he boomed. "Speak your piece here and now or get the hell off the lot!"

For a minute, Harrington stared at him, thunder and lightning in his bloodshot eyes. Then he shrugged his shoulders and smiled contemptuously.

"O. K.," he said, and flopped down on a camp stool.

There was a short interval of silence

so thick that you could hang your hat on it. This Harrington looked at us with a sort of hot-tempered scorn, as if we were so many worms. It may have been my imagination, but I thought that when he looked at me and my uniform, there was a particularly wolfish glint in his eye.

Amos White, thumbs in his swinging vest pockets and his turned-down hat casting a masklike shadow over his eyes, stood with his feet wide apart as though waiting for a shock.

Old Man Sibley, breathing hard, had his bushy-white eyebrows drawn down in a frown, and his jaw seemed to have moved ahead half an inch.

Phineas Becker was leaning against the side of the stake-and-chain wagon, his face unsmiling but somehow very bright and eager as if he was expecting something and enjoyed the prospect.

From here and there over the lot came shouts of canvasmen, the snorts of horses and a low roaring from the animals. This was their feeding time.

"We're waiting!" snapped White, and the words were like two projectiles shot from his mouth. "What's on your mind?"

"Very little, but it's important," Harrington shot back at him. His voice was hard and brittle. "In the first place, I'm the owner and operator of four airplanes down in Clayton, and I stand in strong with the people that run it. It's a boom town and it's tough."

"Well, what of it?" Sibley inquired.

Battle flags were flying in the intolerant Harrington's eyes.

"Plenty of it. In the first place, I and the people back of me, don't intend to have your airplanes come in there with your circus-ticket tie-up and do all the passenger-carrying business for those three days. We intend to do it ourselves, and if you expect to get out of it with a whole skin, you'd better let us do it ourselves. That's straight talk, gentlemen, but it goes as it lays."

MY Adam's apple popped up and down my neck at a high rate of speed as I took two gulps over that one. I didn't know what Groody's arrangement with the circus was exactly, but from what Harrington said it must involve taking ticket buyers up at a reduced rate or something of that sort.

"Let me make it plainer," Harrington went on with that maddening cockiness. "I've got back of me the people that run the town, get that? The Harrington planes intend to get the passenger-carrying gravy if your circus plays there. If you come in there, send your flying circus home. Anything they can do, we'll do, and we'll do all the passenger carrying."

Groody, his lean face outlined in startling relief against the light, looked more than ever like some sardonic demon as his mouth tightened and the drooping lids came so low over his eyes that they were mere lines of light in his face.

"Suppose we don't?" he asked.

"Then I can't be responsible for the consequences," snapped Harrington. For a moment his turbulent eyes stared into Groody's. "And to make it plainer," Harrington rushed on, his eyes blazing, "the town won't want you on any other basis. And when they've got through proving they don't want you, you may not have use for half your railroad train when you start back for winter quarters!"

There was another electric silence. Then Groody said mockingly:

"My, my!"

Mr. Phineas Becker choked on that one and suddenly it seemed that a bit of the tension had broken. Harrington was on his feet as though shot from a gun, his heavy face congested with blood and the pupils of his eyes red spots against a light-pink background.

"Think I'm bluffing, eh?" he raved, taking a belligerent step forward.

"Not necessarily," White slid in with

his colorless voice. "The methods of big city racketeers have extended to the Texas border, haven't they? What you're doing is simply muscling in on the circus gravy."

"Call it that if you like," snapped Harrington. "I'll go further. Treat us right and you'll do plenty of business. Treat us wrong and you won't have enough left to do business with!"

White's eyes flickered to Sibley. That old war horse was literally pawing the ground with one foot. His heavy white mustache seemed to stick out until every hair was a separate spike.

"So you represent big people, do you?" he boomed. "The people that run the town, and if we pay enough graft we can play there, can we?"

"Right! Make money and get protection besides."

"You don't say!"

All of a sudden the old showman was on his feet.

"All right, you've spoken your piece. Now I'll speak mine!" he roared, and his voice made the air shiver. His massive chin and pendulous jowls were quivering with his wrath. "You're going back and tell the people that sent you here, or if, as I think, you're nothing but a big bag of wind, tell yourself that we're going to play your damned town and we ain't gonna pay nobody a nickel! We got our license, and we got six hundred husky men around this show that's goin' to be armed to the teeth. They've been in more clems than you've got hairs in your head and can crack more heads in half a minute than you've got hairs in that anæmic-looking hare lip o' yourn. We're going to bring our airplanes in there, we're going to run our show as we've always run it, and if you are anybody like you gives out a yip, we'll bend a stake around your head until it looks like a pretzel. And now, you big-mouthed crook, get yourself to hell off this lot or we'll ride you offn it on a rail!"

BOYS, it was majestic. It was sublime. It was enough to send the cold shivers up and down your spine and to make you want to go to hell and back just to get another chew of tobacco for Samuel Sibley, showman. He just swept that tough-looking bozo right off his feet.

It was the irrepressible Becker who broke the awed silence.

"'Raaaaay!" he yelled. "That's tellin' 'im!"

It seemed that the nonplused Harrington was glad of a chance to bite off a new mouthful—one he could chew. He whirled on Becker like a shot.

"Keep out of this!" he snarled. "You're workin' for me, remember that!"

"Oh, no I'm not," Becker told him with a grin. "I'm workin' for these people, I hope. I even told them to expect trouble——"

"Oh, you did? Why, you double-crossin', two-faced, sneakin'——"

Without one word or so much as a warning motion, Becker hurled himself toward Harrington as though shot from a gun. Harrington gave way a step, and the next second Becker's fist thudded home to his jaw. It seemed that the breeze of it had Harrington halfway down before the blow hit. As he struck the ground, he bounced back up like a rubber ball and closed with Becker.

For five full seconds, their arms worked like piston rods. There was no science—it was just blind slugging. Neither one tried to protect himself, each seemed bent on annihilating the other. It all happened so quickly and the primitive savagery of the battle was so startling, that it didn't occur to any one to interfere.

Back in the shadows, motionless, I caught sight of Tom Service. He had evidently just arrived in time for the fun. There he stood without a word, looking on with the light glinting in his horn-rimmed glasses.

I've seen many a fight and in fact have flung a fist or two myself in the general direction of somebody's jaw, but never one quite like that.

The men were big and strong and vicious. Around and around they went, Becker swinging like a windmill, Harrington sending straight lefts and rights to Becker's iron jaw. Always Becker bored in, and when one of his roundhouse blows landed, it sent Harrington staggering. Their faces twisted in snarls, Harrington's eyes pools of mad fury and Becker's glinting spots of light in his head, they seemed to be striving to tear each other limb from limb.

Suddenly, Harrington whipped over a right that staggered Becker. They were out in the shadow now, having overturned two chairs. As Harrington leaped forward to press his advantage, Becker ducked under the blow, his left foot forward, and sank a terrific right to Harrington's stomach. The next second, the big fellow had followed that up by butting Harrington in the chest. As Harrington went down on his back, Becker threw himself on him. Now they were locked together, writhing on the grass, kicking, clawing, punching, until it seemed that each of 'em had more arms than an octopus and more legs than a centipede.

The performers were coming from the cook tent now and dozens of canvasmen were gathered in a respectful group fifty feet away, laying bets and observing the battle critically.

Suddenly Tom Service leaped forward like a human projectile. Harrington was on the bottom, Becker's huge hands around his neck.

"That's enough!" Tom yelled sharply.

He was short, and chunky, and round-faced—a very deceptive young man.

Becker, his breath coming in great gasps, paid no attention. At that, Mr. Service got into action, and when he did, the best rough-and-tumble fighter, according to Groody, in the world, was under full steam. The vapid-looking, bespectacled Service had the strength of three men in his chunky body, and in a split second the fight was over. Tom merely took Becker by the neck, pressed his fingers against it and jerked him back. Becker's hands came loose, and with a quick, easy shove, Tom sent him prone on the ground. An instant later he jerked Harrington to his feet.

"You'd b-b-better get g-g-going," Tom said mildly, gazing owlishly through his thick glasses.

ALL this while, Harrington's companion had stood in the background, saying and doing nothing. For a moment, Harrington stood there, his shirt torn, and a red spot on one cheek, his hair in disarray but otherwise unmarked. A bit of his rage seemed to have evaporated as he stood there, his great chest heaving. Then very quietly, and sounding infinitely more impressive than he had at any time before, he said:

"You win now, gentlemen, but I should strongly advise you to take my tip, pay off Groody, if necessary, and come into Clayton prepared to coöperate with us. Come on, Lonny."

And, to the jeers of the canvasmen, he and his companion disappeared into the darkness toward their ship.

Suddenly Becker's bellowing laugh echoed and reëchoed through the night:

"If that ain't a hot one!" he chortled. "I get a job one day and I'm beatin' up my boss the next!"

As he got to his feet, Sibley was walking up and down like one of his own lions.

"I'll swear, Sam, we'd better do like he said," White was saying. "It would be cheaper to pay off Groody and not get into any trouble. That wide-open town don't want any border patrolmen in there either. I tell you it's crazy not to know when you're licked——"

"The hell you say!" roared Sibley.

"These small-town crooks ain't goin' to buffalo Sam Sibley! For the last two weeks, Amos, I've been playin' South with this show just to help you out and because you wanted to. You've been sayin' we got to go into Clayton and clean up. O. K.! But we're goin' as we are and not paying a nickel of graft, understand? And I represent fifty-one per cent of this show. Tryin' to bluff Sam Sibley! We'll show 'em!"

He was roaring up and down, stumping along on his cane, chewing tobacco savagely. There was something grand about that old-timer; and as I shook hands with Tom Service and introduced him to Becker, I was always keeping an eye on Samuel Sibley.

"G-g-glad to know you, Mr. B-B-Becker," Tom said mildly, running one stumpy, well-manicured hand through his blond brush pompadour. That close-cropped hair, plus his horn-rimmed glasses, made his round face appear even more vapid than when he had his hat on.

"Come on and let's eat before they start tearin' the cook tent down," boomed Sibley, and forthwith started along toward the cook tent. White was alongside him, evidently still pleading with him.

"I heard you two b-b-boys had a little trouble," Tom said casually. "I saw the p-p-police and wired a f-f-friend of mine in Chicago a d-d-description of the d-d-dead man, and they'll be l-l-looking up his finger prints, too."

"That's action!" roared Becker. "Say, if you're the manager of this outfit, how's chances of me stickin' along a while? I need a job bad."

"And we need you bad!" Service said, somewhat to my surprise. "We'll probably b-b-book a few dates after the show closes and we'll n-n-need a pilot to replace Slim. I hope you d-d-don't take a notion to lick me like you d-did Harrington."

"Wasn't that funny?" chuckled Becker. "And that ain't my style usually."

"For several reasons, such as making sure you g-g-get out of town with us without legal trouble, j-j-just sit down and write out a little n-n-note to me, will you? Here's a sheet of p-p-paper."

HE handed Becker a small pad of white paper and a short pencil from his coat pocket. And Becker, with a wide grin, sat down in a chair and poised the pencil, waiting.

"Just write this," Service said mildly, and dictated:

"'It is herewith agreed that Phineas Becker will fly with the Groody Flying Circus for a period of thirty days from date, at a salary of ten dollars a day plus five per cent of the gross receipts of the circus.' Now sign it, and then I'll sign it."

"Not that I give a damn," Becker grinned, "but how much does five per cent of the gross receipts amount to?"

"Averages twenty-five dollars a day," Service told him as he proceeded to sign under Becker's sprawling signature. "Well, now, let's eat, huh?"

"Good, but I've got to wash up," Becker said as Service tucked the piece of paper in his pocket.

Groody was gazing at Service with over-bright eyes, and a cryptic smile on his lips. He seemed much interested in what Tom was up to.

"We'll meet you at the cook tent door," Service told Becker, as the new member of the Groody Flying Circus poured out some water in a wash basin. "I want Groody and Slim to see a man over there that they both know, before he gets away."

"O. K.," Becker said, and the next minute we were out of earshot.

Suddenly Service's speech was very terse and incisive and there was no trace of his hesitant stutter as he said:

"I didn't want to waste a minute letting you know. While I was down at

the police station I made a tracing of the writing on the slip of paper you found in the dead man's pocket. There isn't a doubt in the world that it was written by Phineas Becker!"

I stopped dead in my tracks and opened my mouth three times without being able to get a word out. Groody just stood and looked at the chubby little ex-Federal agent whose steel trap mind was a by-word to all who knew him and a good many people who didn't.

"But, good Lord," I finally stammered, "he killed the guy that tried to kill me! We've just seen him punch hell out of his boss——"

"Nevertheless and notwithstanding," Service said crisply, "the truth is the truth. I had him write that contract fast and under uncomfortable conditions just to be sure. There is no doubt that up there in the air this afternoon, he wrote out those two words and stuck the paper in the machine gunner's pocket himself!"

CHAPTER III.
A LONG BATTLE.

SUPPER was a highly peculiar meal. We didn't get a chance for any catch-as-catch-can conversation after Service's disclosure because of the number of people about, and Phineas Becker himself caught up with us by the time we reached the cook tent door.

The cook tent was divided in half, one side being the stag side where canvasmen and others without womenfolks partook of their provender. On the other side the big bosses, performers, ballet girls, and anybody who had a ball and chain clanking around his ankles, put on the feed bag.

We ate at a long table with the boss canvasman, boss animal, the lot superintendent and other worthies ranking just below the owners themselves. At the table behind us, the four assistant boss canvasmen and other assistant bosses, ate loudly. The balance of the thirty odd tables were occupied by canvasmen, male side-show freaks, candy butchers, pole riggers, razorbacks, and fifty-nine other varieties of showmen.

You may well believe that one Slimuel X. Evans was in a highly scrambled state of mind. I tried not to think of my troubles, however, and I will say that I attacked rare roast beef, German fried potatoes, tame spinach, and other plain but honest food with some gusto. Four huge pitchers at the long table held abundant supplies of milk, coffee, tea, and lemonade, and I found myself casually pouring a portion of lemonade in my coffee to heat it up. Becked, gazing around him with boyish interest, didn't seem to have a thing on his mind and he put away more food than a camel does water.

Groody and Service and I tried to make light chit-chat, but Becker did most of it. Halfway through the meal I said casually:

"How are tricks in general, George? Why so set on this Clayton date? Broke?"

"Worse than broke," Groody said grimly. "That young oil field that we're trying to develop eats up money faster than the elephants inhale hay. Exactly seven days from now, five thousand dollars has got to be paid on a note or we lose half our land."

He and Service and Bob Corrigan were involved in a big oil development, and for almost a year, Groody, at odd times, had been risking his neck daily for big dough in order to pour more money into the project. There were some shadows under his eyes, I noticed, and he looked considerably worried, which was unusual for him.

"Any money you make out of it you'll have earned," I told him, "providing you don't break your neck before you collect any!"

"What the hell!" rasped Groody. "I've been knocking around for thirty-five years. It's time the whole bunch of

us got to be something besides a bunch of crazy ginks without a sou to their names, with no idea where they're going, and very little idea of where they've been. I'll be damned if I'm not going to get myself a stake and have some comfort and peace for once."

"That's the reason I stick in the army," I told him. "I know I'd starve to death if I got out."

There had been an undertone of almost savage seriousness in what he'd said, however, that hit me a little hard. He'd battled for more than a year to get himself that stake he talked about, and if the proposition was about to slip out from under him after all he'd sacrificed, I had considerable understanding of what it would mean to him.

DURING the rest of the meal, he was not precisely the devil-may-care Groody I had known, who would shoot everything he owned, including his shirt, on any good gamble without worrying if he lost. The reason for that, I guess, was that he had involved a considerable number of his friends in the deal.

"Damned if you're not right," Becker said, suddenly staring down at the table as he played with his fork. "I'm in a worse fix than you. I'm thirty-eight and where am I? Ain't got a decent pair of pants to my name!"

"See the show to-night and forget your w-w-worries," Service suggested mildly as he got up from the table. "It's quite an outf-f-fit at that."

"Those were my intentions," Becker said, taking a last swig of coffee and standing up also. "I'm going to take it in from side show to peanuts. Let's get going, huh?"

We couldn't beg off from going into the side show with him, nor get rid of him until the performance was well under way. Then, on the excuse of having seen so many circuses, we decamped, leaving him gazing at the performing lions in the inclosed arena with all the interest of a six-year-old. Groody, Service, and I made our way out through the back yard, where brightly costumed kinkers were dashing to and fro, and then into the menagerie tent, one wall of which paralleled the big top.

Already the horses were being hitched to the cages which housed the female lions and the tigers, both of which had done their stunts in the arena. They rolled off the lot, bound for the runs, with the show a little less than one third over. Already an army of canvasmen was starting to tear down the menagerie tent. By the time the show was half over, all the animals, save the elephants, would be on their way to the train and the menagerie tent would be down. The cook tent was down, loaded, and at the train already.

We leaned against a couple of poles at the entrance from the back yard into the menagerie tent, and I lit a cigarette.

"Well, caballeros, what ho?" I inquired.

"Bad cheer, I'm afraid," Service said incisively. "Before we talk to S-S-Sibley and White, let's figure this out a little. That handwriting was absolutely Becker's."

"I can't believe it even yet," I protested without conviction. "I could believe that Harrington or somebody in Clayton, if they knew a border patrolman was coming, might like to knock him off as long as they could do it without much chance of discovery. I'd have hit the ground from seventy-five hundred feet, the ship would blow up and burn, and nobody'd ever be the wiser that I'd been shot. It would be just another flying accident. But Becker killed the man that tried to kill me and we saw him with our own eyes beat hell out of Harrington——"

"I w-w-wonder whether he d-d-did or not?" Service interrupted.

"What do you mean?" barked Groody.

"I may be wrong," Service said.

"They were making a lot of motions, but nobody got hurt very bad. What I'm g-g-getting at is that the whole thing could've been staged."

If it had been anybody else but Tom Service talking, I would have given voice at this point to several loud haws and a couple of miscellaneous tee-hees. But Mr. Thomas Service, major of Military Intelligence during the War, Federal agent of great renown after it, son of a millionaire ex-governor, and survivor of a hundred adventures all around the world, was some one you couldn't laugh off. When his gray-blue eyes were so keen and sharp behind his glasses and you knew that a supercharged brain was working like a well-oiled piece of machinery, you just had to listen.

"Wouldst elucidate further?" I requested.

"Yes, pray do," Groody said mockingly, and all at once, for no reason, it seemed that several years had been wiped away and that Groody and I were greeting things with blithe unconcern, the way we did when we were young.

"What I'm getting at is this," Service said in clipped syllables. "Suppose Becker is a much bigger shot and an entirely different type of man than he would seem to be. In other words, suppose he's an able and ruthless criminal. After learning that you were coming to Clayton and that something he'd planned was liable to be spoiled by the presence of the law, he hires a thug to knock you off. Good luck or your alertness, or both, spoil his scheme. You've got to admit that its failure was a miracle."

"I do," I said feelingly.

"Where does that leave him?" Service asked oratorically.

MR. DAN DONOVAN, the husky boss canvasman, was roaring up and down the tent, shouting: "Come on now, shake it up a little, shake it up a little!" There was bedlam as quarter poles came down, cages were run off the lot behind spanking teams, and the male lions came bounding up the runway from the arena and were driven roaring through the cages. The three of us, however, our heads so close together that you would thing we were harmonizing "Sweet Adeline," were paying no attention whatever to what was going on.

"What do you mean, 'where does that leave him'?" I asked.

"He's up in the air, his man has failed and the both of them are going to be shot down by you in a minute or two. A criminal, hard-boiled enough to deliberately plot the murder of a man he'd never known would certainly be hard-boiled enough to knock off the machine gunner who had failed, and use it to save his own life."

"I never thought of that," I said numbly.

"Nor me," Groody agreed. "Go on, Thomasio."

"Then we'll say that he had heard about that Estobar round-up and knew, as plenty of people along the border do, that Estobar's brother has vowed vengeance. More or less in a panic, he scribbles out that note, sticks it in the dead man's pocket, avoids being shot down and then gets himself a brilliant idea. He's in right with you. Why shouldn't he figure that he'd join up with us, thereby being able to help enormously from the inside and seeing to it that whatever objective somebody in Clayton has got, is surely achieved?

"Now, wait a minute," he went on as I started to interrupt. "If by any chance I should be right, his staging a battle with Harrington—which as a matter of fact, he could have arranged in advance when he telephoned Harrington this afternoon—was a stroke of genius. All crooks are dumb at times. Writing that phony note and signing Estobar's name would seem on the face of it to be so useless and so silly that no thug of any stature at all would try

to pull it. But if, as I believe, Becker is as cold and calculating a criminal as you'll run across in a month of Sundays, I can still understand how, in a panic in the air, he'd pull such a stunt."

"Lord," I said piteously, "and his name is Phineas!"

Tom had been talking with his mouth close to our ears to overcome the racket of the tear-down. Every cage was out now and the elephants were going into the ring. Groody started to say something, but was interrupted.

"Have to get out of there, boys. We're ready to bring her down!" bellowed Donovan; and we drifted out under the side walls, which were still upheld by the poles, and out into the quieter night.

"What were you going to say," Service asked, "before we were so rudely interrupted?"

"I was going to say this," Groody said, thoughtfully biting off the end of a new cigar as he stared into the darkness. "If what you say is true, we'll figure that somebody is planning to commit murder to put over some deal. Now, listen, Thomas. Keeping a circus out of an oil town or keeping the flyers with that circus out of it, just so the local boys can make three or four thousand dollars, is not important enough to bring on so much skullduggery."

"Right!" snapped Service.

"And incidentally," I said, "you told me over the phone that things weren't going so well, and you acted as though things had already happened that had you worried."

"Most of what I referred to," Groody told me, "were these threats from Clayton and that sort of thing. But the atmosphere round the show seems wrong some way. A lot of the old canvasmen and other employees have been fired in the last three or four weeks, and the forty or fifty new men that joined on seem to be funny customers. Sibley and White started disagreeing on everything. The morale of the show went to pot. There was just sort of a storm in the air, and with trouble seeming certain down at Clayton, the whole works just got on my nerves and I figured that somebody with a few official powers might even help the show. There are fights among the canvasmen all the time, three or four knifings, and the troupe is sort of divided into two groups. These forty or fifty new men against the world, so to speak."

"There is another thing, too," Service pointed out. "White's been dead set on making this oil country to recoup his losses. In order to get down here, Sibley had to O. K. the new route, changing the route the general agent had made out and playing a lot of small towns on the route—Benge here, for instance—in order to get to the oil towns. Peculiar hunch on White's part, especially since they only want to play Clayton and not go on to Borston and other towns. As Groody said, the whole atmosphere around here has been lousy."

"Just a show gone to pot, eh?" I said. "Well, going back to where we were, you boys have a very well-taken point when you say that all this plot and counterplot, including murder, certainly argues something more important than keeping three or four airplanes out of Clayton. So that seems to leave just two possibilities. On the one hand, we may have been seeing too many bum movies. We imagine we see the false mustache of "Dead-shot Dick, the Terror of the Border," peeking out from behind every bush.

"On the starboard paw, however, we may be right. In that case, what's in the cards?"

FOR a moment, no one spoke. The blare of the circus band came drifting to our ears, and a mighty shout from Donovan fairly split the side walls of the menagerie tent. All at once the four bail rings, which held up the

canvas around the four king poles, dropped down at once and the menagerie top became a sea of canvas billowing over the ground. As the canvasmen spread over its heaving surface like so many ants and started to unlace it into sections, Service said levelly:

"If we're right it means that this week-end in Clayton, with the presence of the circus possibly being an aid to the scheme, somebody is planning a huge coup of some kind."

"Then why would there have been threats and an effort to keep the show out of Clayton?" asked Groody.

"Those threats may have been a stage setting so that the show would make almost any terms at the last minue," Service answered promply. "And remember this. Who do they really want to keep out of town? No. 1, a border patrolman. No. 2, the Groody Flying Circus. Remember that three members of that flying circus—you and I and Corrigan—have become known as sort of show detectives."

"And with particular reference to the manager of that circus," I said spaciously. "He's Thomas Service, who may be, for all they know, still employed by the government."

"Right," nodded Service. "We may be wrong, boys, but if we are, we've got plenty of excuses."

For a moment I dragged on my cigarette, thinking things over. Perhaps it was the band, or it might have been the darkness or the effect of the lift and surge of the busy circus lot; anyhow, my fur started to rise along my back, and a pleasant shiver ran over me. Every once in a while, I get that way when my prodigious proboscis (big nose) senses a battle from afar.

Suddenly Groody took an unlit cigar from his mouth and threw it on the ground.

"So be it," he said harshly. "It's been a long battle, gents, and we're not going to lose it now. If there's something back of this, we might as well be in the thick of it and plan to get well paid for our trouble. Now let's go and see White and Sibley, huh?"

"O. K.," Service said. "I think there's only one procedure to follow as far as Becker is concerned. We must not let him know that we suspect him at all, and we must give him rope enough to hang himself."

"Right-o," I agreed; and Groody nodded.

We strolled silently over the partially denuded lot and found Messrs. White and Sibley engaged in the apparently unpleasant process of watching the count up in the main ticket wagon. From fifteen feet away, we could hear Sibley's rumbling tones.

"We'd better do plenty of business in Clayton to make up for these flag stations!" he was rumbling grumpily. "Look at it, Amos, look at it! Four thousand two hundred bucks on the day. Why, this God-forsaken, flea-bitten, sun-baked paradise for tarantulas and rattlesnakes wouldn't assay a dollar to the square acre!"

"We had to break our jump, didn't we?" White snapped as we appeared in the door.

"Can I see you a minute, gentlemen?" Service said.

"Sure!" boomed Sibley. "Let me out of here, though, so I won't have to look at that statement any more."

IN a moment Service, without any indication of his customary hesitant stutter, was telling them the story. Sibley puffed and blew like a porpoise; but as far as White was concerned, it was like shooting a popgun at an iceberg.

"So it's my suggestion," Service concluded, "that arrangements be made to keep Becker under surveillance every minute of the time. I'll get a finger print of him to-night and we'll get a border patrol ship to fly it to San An-

tonio. They must have a pretty detailed Bertillon record of our better-known criminals there, and we may find out something by tracing the dead man, besides."

"I'll bet ten to one," Sibley stated, "that after we get there somebody is goin' to take the opportunity of pullin' somethin' in town while three quarters of the town that's awake are out at the lot. I can remember the days, not so long ago, when second-story men used to go through all the houses along the route of the parade, while people were out watching."

"Very possible," nodded Service, "and there may be some money in it for all concerned if we can stop it. If we should ward off a bank robbery or something like that, I imagine a little bit of reward will come everybody's way."

"That's all very well," White said levelly, "but it doesn't affect the main point. Now get me straight." His eyes shifted from one to the other of us as though to make sure we were all listening. "I'm the man responsible for this show being down here—I admit it. Everything I've got in the world is tied up in it. I'm broke except for what profit we may make in Clayton. Whatever is being planned in Clayton is none of our business as long as it doesn't affect us. Our object is to get in there, have no trouble, play our show, and get out. What does all this stuff mean? Why are we having trouble? It's because we have got the Groody Flying Circus and a border patrolman with us—that's why.

"And I'm going to make one more offer for the good of everybody concerned, including myself and the show, you, Sam Sibley, and you boys, too. I'll personally give you two thousand bucks out of the first day's receipts in Clayton if you'll all stay away from there!"

"Not by a damn sight!" roared Sibley. Then he quieted down somewhat and put his hand on the harassed younger man's shoulder. "In the first place, I hate to be bluffed. In the second place, there's only two things possible—one, that we're barkin' up the wrong tree and givin' a lot of false importance to what's happenin', in which case havin' these boys along don't mean nothin'; on the other hand, if we *are* in for a fine how-de-do, we'll need them and their planes and Evans's uniform and his guns."

"You can't laugh off the attempted murder of Evans," snapped White.

"Of course not," Sibley said heartily. "But I'm commencin' to get so damn curious in my old age that I crave to see what's goin' to happen."

I couldn't make out the old duck exactly. As a matter of cold fact, I myself thought, from the standpoint of ordinary good sense, that White's suggestion had all the earmarks of being logical. It wasn't us who fought to stay, it was Sibley who insisted for the next five minutes. And he ended up as we parted with a very cryptic remark to me.

"I may be able to furnish you a little information by the time the mornin's come, lieutenant," he said. "I'm an old dog and seen a lot of tricks in the show business."

I wish that I'd had any idea of some of the new ones both he and I were going to learn—and forthwith.

CHAPTER IV.
THE MASKED MAN.

IT was about eleven thirty that night, and I had my popping optics focused on the process of completing the tear-down of the show, when Tom Service drifted by me. I was standing near the light wagon, from the top of which two searchlights were bathing the busy scene in wan light.

Dan Donovan and his four two-fisted assistants were keeping up a barrage of exhortation to the sweating canvasmen.

Pole wagons, plank wagons, and canvas wagons, drawn by anywhere from four to eight horses, were wheeling off the lot in a steady stream; and four separate gangs of laborers, each commanded by an assistant boss canvasman, were perspiring prodigiously as each tried to outdo the other and get their tasks done first.

"Got a perfect finger print of B-Becker's," Tom said, that mild hesitancy again in his voice. "Caught the night train back to San Antonio with it, too. We'll get a wire in the m-morning at Clayton. George and I have decided it would be best for you to ride the train to-night. Our mechanic can fly our ship over, and Groody will bring the Fokker over in the morning. We don't want you exposed to anything more, inasmuch as you seem to be their most important target."

"Suits me," I chirped cheerily. "I shall ride a flat car and renew my youth."

"In that case," Service said gently, replacing his glasses, "I'll put a man in my b-b-bunk and sleep out there with you. I've already got Dan Donovan assigned to watch Becker all night."

And with that he walked off, his short legs twinkling along below his chunky body.

At twelve ten the tear-down was over. Seeing that tented city of nearly eight hundred people, to say nothing of assorted cats, elephants, and equipment, disappear from that lot and leave it as clean as a whistle, was like seeing a magician hide an elephant in an egg.

Becker joined me as I accepted Sibley's invitation to ride down to the runs in the truck that carried the bosses. It was the last vehicle off the lot. Believe me, I had my hand on my gun just for comfort as I sat next to the laughing, joking, apparently carefree flyer. It certainly was hard to tell whether that bozo was fish, flesh, or fowl.

Down at the runs, with the long, white circus train looking ghostly in the gloom, and the rumble of the wagons loading on the flats providing an undertone for the laughter and singing of the troupers who were perched on the railroad embankment, I got the biggest kick that I ever got out of a show. Every time I think of a circus I want to go back——

Oh, to the devil with that!

As we alighted from the truck, Dan Donovan started roaring a roundelay. It wasn't so sweet, but it was loud.

I guided Becker to the privilege car, otherwise known as the pie car, which was in the middle of the train. His little gray eyes glistened with amazement as he beheld a lunch counter which bisected half its length, and an array of gambling tables filling up the other half of the car. There was Klondike, craps, roulette, blackjack, and poker for the delectation of the showmen, each table presided over by a circus attaché. The games were square, run by the show with only the regular house cut.

"Well, I'll be damned!" roared Phineas. "This is what I call the life. Lend me ten bucks, will you?"

By a miracle I had it and lent it to him with as much pleasure as I would have taken in presenting him with my little finger. He promptly went to work at Klondike, and as Dan Donovan gave Service and me a wink and eased over alongside him, I knew that I could forget him for the night. If he tried to pull anything, he would be in the best pair of hands with the show.

Tom and I had a cup of coffee apiece, and when I say coffee, I don't mean colored water. The smell of it was enough to make your hair curl, and a whiff of its steam would make a mosquito start to work on a marble monument. The circus men were inhaling a large quantity of doughnuts washed down with beakers of this brew, however, and seemed to show no ill effects.

I was aware of a subtle undertone of excitement in the crowded car. They were discussing Clayton and what might or might not happen there, and it was as though some peculiar electricity had been generated in the air which made them all restless, half eager and half fearful.

At about one thirty, the train prepared to make ready to begin to start with a couple of quick lurches.

"Let's turn in," Service suggested. "We'll stop by my bunk and get a couple of blankets and some pillows. You can use Groody's."

"Why did you say you were going to get a man to sleep in your bunk?" I inquired.

"Don't want to overlook any bets," Service said mildly. "I know it's a million-to-one chance, but if there should be somebody that wanted to visit you during the night, he probably wouldn't do it if he knew you weren't alone over there."

I saw his point, not that I attached much importance to it.

A few minutes later, we were making our way down through the crowded stag cars toward the flats. The upper crust, such as performers, fourth assistant deputy superintendents, and others, all had bunks to themselves, but the rest, like candy butchers and canvasmen, slept two in a berth whether upper or lower. Each built-in berth had so many boxes and shelves attached to the walls that a man had to turn himself into a pretzel to crawl into position to sleep. When he got there, he couldn't move half an inch in any given direction. As we passed through the high-hat compartment car, where such massive muck-a-mucks as Sibley and White, star performers, and such like lived luxuriously in individual two-by-four staterooms, we met White coming from the washroom.

"Fixing Slim up a b-b-bed on the flats," Tom stated.

"You're taking to the open, too, Service?" Sibley inquired from the open door of his compartment.

"No," answered Tom, "I like a mattress."

Soon we were picking our way along the flat cars where wagon after wagon, their wheels braced with cleats, formed a seemingly endless chain. Ten minutes later, ensconced under a pole wagon, we were lying on our backs watching the endless mesquite roll by and reveling in the cool night air.

"I'm not sleepy," I told Tom, "so pop off, old man, and I'll waken you when I feel dopy."

That may sound silly to you, gents, but out there in the darkness in the middle of the mesquite, with the sleepy yawns and growls of the animals reaching my ears and the memories of the day crowding my peanut mind, I commenced to feel a little creepy. Not that I really thought anything would happen, you understand, but then something might.

Service dropped off to sleep like a baby and I just lay there, looked at the stars, and let what I sometimes refer to as my mind, run riot. I must have been more tired than I thought and yet I don't believe that I really fell asleep. I think I indulged in a light coma. Be that as it may, however, I came out of my state of suspended animation with my eyes wide open and every faculty alert, but my muscles wouldn't work.

Four feet away from me, Service was breathing like the overgrown baby he looked like. And I was staring at a crouched figure, silent as a ghost, that was stealing around the rear wheel of the long pole wagon.

For the moment I thought that I was in a nightmare, but the click of the wheels on the rails took away even that comfort. I couldn't seem to move or think. I was as harmless as a cooing dove with a snake crawling toward it.

I'd never precisely had that happen to me before. All circumstances com-

bined somehow, to make the stealthy approach of that figure infinitely horrible. He was dressed all in black, and as he came closer I saw that there was a dark handkerchief with eye holes over his face, and that he was wearing a cap pulled low over his eyes. He didn't make a sound, and there was something lithe and catlike in the way he fairly slid toward me.

I couldn't even rouse Service. I was no good to myself or anybody else, and alongside of me the Statue of Liberty would seem to have St. Vitus dance. He stopped, one hand resting against the pole wagon, about two feet from me. I was facing him, watching him numbly through half-closed eyes. Over at the other side of the flat, invisible to the unknown man, was Service still sleeping calmly.

I know it sounds silly and it's a hell of a lot sillier than it sounds, but right then and there, with probably the solution of the whole mystery lying in that sinister figure, I didn't have a thought in my mind. I noticed vaguely that he seemed to be very heavily built and was short and powerful-looking. Then, from somewhere in his peculiar clothing, he produced a short club like an unusually large and thick blackjack. He seemed to crouch a bit and then, as though some spring had been released underneath him, he threw himself at me.

Well, brothers and sisters, I may have been a corpse up until then, but I turned into a cross between an embattled barracuda and a buzz saw. Without a conscious thought, I jerked one knee back, and then unfolded my four-foot leg with considerable rapidity. My foot did not dawdle on its way. There are pleasanter things than a kick in the stomach in any language, but a kick in the stomach from one of my feet is next-door to premeditated murder. My victim gave a great gasp and doubled up with pain.

"Coming!" yelled Tom Service, as I leaped to my feet.

I was only half up when the unknown, from his crouched position, launched himself at me again. I leaped back on the swaying car as Tom Service, forced to crawl because of the lowness of the pole wagon, scrambled toward us.

I just escaped the masked man's clutching arms as the train hit a curve and almost upset me. He half fell, and as he did he dropped the blackjack and a pistol appeared as though by magic in his hand. Once again I kicked, and the pistol, the report of it cracking sharply through the night air, sent a bullet into the pole wagon.

I dived at him in a flying tackle as he scrambled to one knee. We rolled half over the side and I could feel muscles that seemed to be made of spring steel. The next second, our bodies half over the edge of the flat car, I was looking down at the speeding ground, his fingers clutching at my throat. He gave a mighty heave, just as Tom Service straightened and leaped for us. For a split second that I'll never forget, I didn't know whether it was to be my unknown antagonist or me. Then Tom Service had him by one leg. I gave every last bit of strength I had, releasing his hold around my throat and giving one mighty shove. A scream I'll never forget split the night as he dropped off the speeding train, head first.

For an instant, Service held him by one ankle, but Tom was half over the edge of the flat car himself. In another second, he would have lost balance and fallen off. I got to my feet as fast as I could, but that was nowhere soon enough.

Tom had to let go to save himself, and one more raucous shriek of utter terror shattered the night as he dropped out of sight.

I dropped on my face, peering over the edge of the car, to see what had happened to him, but we were rounding a slight curve and he was out of sight.

Service, as calm as a May morning, sat down. I sat up and for a minute we looked at each other wordlessly. I took three deep breaths and then said:

"Beautiful evening, isn't it?"

"What happened?" he asked sharply, and I told him in a few thousand ill-chosen words.

The train was rumbling on as though nothing had happened, although some of the cats were roaring a little. Service looked at his watch and then got up and paced up and down the speeding flat car.

"We can't stop the train—everybody's asleep and there's nothing we can do until morning anyway," he stated. "We're due in Clayton in an hour."

"God, I'd give ten years of my life—or at least ten minutes—to have saved that cuckoo alive," I stated sorrowfully.

"Even his gun went overboard, damn it!" Service said, more agitated than I'd ever seen him. "We're twenty miles from nowhere out here and probably we can pick up this egg, if he's still alive, by airplane—not that there's any chance of his being alive."

"The man that's missing off the train will tell the tale," I pointed out.

Suddenly I was somewhat shaken from the reaction and when I tried to ignite a cheroot, the lighted match looked as though I was signaling somebody by the wigwag system.

"Nobody knows the right names of half the canvasmen of the show," Service told me absently. "Not that we won't be able to find out something. Maybe, by a miracle, he'll still be alive."

We sat and talked as dawn came up and touched my nose with pink. Far in the distance, a forest of blackened derricks loomed above the green-gray chaparral. A little while longer and the pungent, unpleasant smell of petroleum was heavy in the air.

Finally we were clanking through the yards of a typical boom town. It was typical in a lot of ways. Tank cars filled the yards, and everywhere one looked a mushroom growth of shacks and tents and temporary structures of all kinds provided an ugly sea in which there stood an occasional two or three-story house, which indicated that there had been a town before the boom came. Even more typical was the fact that at five forty-five in the morning, in the chill light of dawn, there was a mob of at least a thousand people waiting for the circus to come in, most of them drunk. There were roughnecks, dance-hall girls, well and land scouts. Boom town society was out in force. As the train rumbled across what was evidently the main street of Clayton, lights were pouring from dozens of saloons, gambling houses, and dance halls, and the streets were clogged with people and vehicles of all kinds.

Did you ever see a town that seemed to be on a spree in the early morning? It gives me a headache to think of it even now.

Messrs. Tom Service and Slimuel X. Evans had little opportunity, however, to sample the flavor of Clayton right then. As the train drew to a stop on a switch a quarter of a mile beyond the depot, with that growing mob of hilarious people looking on from an adjacent hillside, it seemed as though all the ordinarily quiet sleeping cars broke out in a rash of people. Performers who had never been up before ten o'clock in their lives popped out of every doorway like seeds squirted out of a lemon. Even the canvasmen whose duty it was to be up and at 'em as quick as the train came in, had no sleep in their eyes and were talking excitedly.

Tom and I leaped off the flat car and rushed down to the growing mob of frightened troupers. Head and shoulders above every one, Donovan and Becker were standing together, cheek by cheek and jowl by jowl.

"Something's happened besides what happened to us," Service said casually,

but his eyes were glinting coldly behind his glasses.

"What's the matter?" I asked the blinking albino who was one of the side-show features.

"They say that Mr. Sibley and Mr. White were murdered!" he stuttered.

We made our way through the disheveled-looking, haggard crowd.

"What's up, Donovan?" Service said. "Somebody killed?"

The big, black-headed Irishman whirled to face us. Becker turned, too, his battered face alight with zestful interest.

"Looks thot way," the big boss canvasman snarled, his sunken eyes blazing balefully. "Sam Sibley and Amos White were aboard when we shtarted from Benge, and divil a wan av thim's with us now. And this train didn't make no shtops!"

CHAPTER V.
BIG STAKES.

REGARDLESS of hell, high water, or highway robbery, however, the show must go up and on. Consequently, half an hour later, with Service at the depot prepared to send and receive messages, I was alongside Dan Donovan up at the circus lot.

I was wondering where Bob Corrigan was—the other flyer with Groody's circus who had flown one of the ships over to Clayton the night before. I probably don't need to argue at great length to convince you that I was in a condition where I was asking other people who I was. I was in so far over my head that there didn't seem any hope of being able to come up for air.

As Donovan walked on the lot, me striding alongside him and both of us following the squat little darky who was carrying a heavy load of laying-out pins, I repeated for the tenth time the only semi-intelligent remark I had been able to enunciate for the last hour.

"Undoubtedly the same man that tried to get me, heaved Sibley and White overboard, probably killing them first," I said to the lowering Irishman. "Who'll be in charge of the show now?"

"Fred Bullock, the assistant manager," Donovan told me. "Well, Oi've got to get to work."

I watched him absently as he gazed around the lot with a piercing and bloodshot eye. It was half a mile south of the seething boom town, on the very edge of the Rio Grande. To add to my mental misery, I was tortured by the remembrance of those two shrieks which my victim had emitted when we tossed him overboard. Not that my tender heart was my ruination, and that I was feeling sorry for the poor devil—far from it. I would have wished he had as many lives as a cat and that I could snuff them out one by one, laughing fiendishly the while. What bothered me was the conviction which was blossoming within me that I had recognized something in the timbre of those cries. For the life of me I couldn't place it, however, and a hasty check-up had showed that there was not a man missing from the train except White and Sibley. Furthermore, every car porter had sworn stoutly that no one had left the cars after the last of the privilege car customers had laid them down to sleep.

In a way I've never felt so helpless as I did then—walking around, ten feet behind Donovan with at least fifteen hundred denizens of Clayton rimming the field. I felt like a sick sardine surrounded by sharks. Out at the entrance, the steam wagon, already belching vapor, was waiting for instructions, and behind it wagon after wagon was lined up awaiting Donovan's pleasure.

A boss canvasman has practically laid out his lot when he drives one single laying-out pin into the ground. That first pin indicates the location of the No. 1 king pole for the big top—meaning

the first big center pole from the entrance. The driving of that pin lays out the lot as though by magic, for it automatically sets the location of the three other big-top king poles. Just a matter of measurement from then on.

The menagerie top must run parallel to the big top, its exact location thereby set. The back yard must automatically be placed behind both tents, and the ballet top, pad room, dressing room top, and other features of the back yard have their regular locations in relation to the menagerie and big tops. Furthermore, every wagon from the biggest pole wagon to the lowliest plank wagon has an exact position in relation to the big top. The midway must run from the canvas marquee to the entrance of the lot, and the side-show tent has its definite place on the midway.

Only the horse and cook tents have to be laid out separately, the only rule being that they not be close together. Outside of those two important canvas structures, when Mr. Daniel Donovan sized up the lay of the land and drove the No. 1 laying-out pin into the ground, he had pierced the heart of his problem and had set the landscape architecture of the show.

A moment more and the steam wagon was rolling in, stake wagons were trotting on the lot with the stake-driving machines behind them, and busy assistant bosses and laborers were measuring with a steel tape from that single stake.

It was at this moment that two things happened simultaneously. One was the drone of two airplanes in the sky, which I speedily recognized as the Fokker and Groody's ship, and the other was the arrival of Mr. Thomas Service at the lot, accompanied by Mr. Becker.

"Come over here, I want to see you," Tom said in low tones. "B-b-better watch the sh-sh-show go up, Becker," he said more loudly. "It's the hottest s-s-sight in the circus."

"Believe I will!" roared Becker. "How about it, Daniel, old scout? Mind if I stick around?"

"Delighted," snorted Donovan, a sardonic smile on his face as he looked at us. "Shtick roight alongside of me and Oi'll show ye how it's done. Aany news?"

"Yes!" bellowed Becker. "A hand car just come into the station with old Sibley aboard, alive but unconscious."

"Thot right?" yelled Donovan to Service.

Service nodded. "But they didn't see a sign of White. The old man's in a doctor's house in town in a coma, and nobody's got any idea whether he'll ever come to or not."

"White could've been pitched over thot there little canyon we come over," Donovan pointed out, his sunken eyes feverishly bright.

Service nodded.

"Or he might not have b-b-been killed and w-w-wandered to some ranch house or something," he said. "Sibley was h-hit a terrible blow on the head with some b-blunt instrument before he was thrown over-b-board. Got a fractured skull, they think."

"You're supposed to be a good detective! Hop to it!" roared Donovan. "Oi've got to get this show up regardless."

The lot was now a cluttered-up scene of tremendous industry. Stake-driving gangs of six men, their sledges falling on the big stakes with the rhythmic roll of an expertly smitten drum, were working mightily as two stake-driving machines drove the smaller guy-rope stakes. Pole wagons were distributing king, quarter, and side-wall poles where they belonged, canvas was being rolled off wagons, and spread out in regular sections, and in lordly majesty the herd of eighteen elephants was swinging on the lot prepared to help out.

One hundred yards away, the kitchen of the cook tent was already up, steam

pipes connected from the steam wagon to the ranges, and in less than an hour breakfast would be ready.

"Let's go on over there and see Groody," Service said quickly. "He's about to l-l-land. See?"

The two ships were circling above a field less than half a mile away, on the river bank. The Clayton pool was an unusual one in a way, because the town itself was only half a mile from the river and all the oil derricks spread out fanwise in a northerly direction from it. In the interim, between town and river, only two derricks showed, neither one of them in operation.

"I wonder where Bob Corrigan is?" I said fretfully as we started for the planes. "Something may have happened to him—gee, I believe that's him now!".

It was, flying up the river from the west. Or at least the airplane was the type used by Groody.

"Had trouble, ten to one, and got out of t-t-town for the night," Service guessed.

"What time do you think you'll hear from San Antonio on those finger prints?" I asked as we made our way through a packed mass of people ten deep, who were watching the busy scene.

"I don't know; some time to-day," he said.

"Bob's losing no time coming down," I said, and he wasn't.

Five minutes later, I was shaking hands with the big, shaggy-headed, homely flyer, and he in his blunt, heavy way was telling us:

"Three bozos came out and damn near wrecked the ship, so I beat it down to Laredo for the night. I don't know who they represented, but it doesn't look as though our airplanes were wanted here, boys."

"Wait until you hear our yarn," Groody said sardonically, and proceeded to spin it over the plate. When I added the final chapter, the four of us stood for a minute and looked at each other.

"And the hell of it is," I said finally, "that I'm pretty sure I recognized that voice. The fellow wasn't so tall, but he was big around and——"

"Couldn't have been Harrington, could it?" Groody suggested, chewing his cigar meditatively. "He might have smuggled himself aboard the train and let that fellow with him fly the ship back."

"No, it was too small for Harrington," I said.

"Here comes Becker," Groody said suddenly; and I turned my head to behold the mysterious Phineas putting one foot before the other at a rapid rate of speed.

"One of the first things we've got to arrange," Service said thoughtfully, "is how to guard these ships. The first and most obvious move for Harrington, or whoever's back of him, to make is to see that they are unable to get into the air. I'll bet ten to one there will be a sudden mob scene start around these crates before the day is over, and if it isn't handled quick and sudden, they'll be too smashed up to take the air."

"Say, what do you think happened?" Becker roared from fifty feet away.

"What?" I inquired.

"Harrington comes on the lot," Becker said, he and Corrigan eying each other with a certain dignified reserve. "He comes up to me big as life and says: 'If I were you I wouldn't let the sun go down on me in Clayton.'

"'Oh, no?' says I. 'Well, if I were you, I wouldn't let eight o'clock overtake you on this lot, and it's two minutes to eight now!' Say! you should have seen his face. He looked as though he'd give ten years of his life to clip me one, but then he beats it!"

"Where are his ships?" I asked.

Groody jerked his thumb.

"About two miles north," he stated. "Got a couple of canvas hangars."

"That's his field," nodded Becker, "and believe me——"

There came a sudden ejaculation from Groody.

"See that fellow riding toward us?" he snapped, his sloping eyes glittering. "If that isn't Amos White, I'm Christopher Columbus!"

I took a look. Galloping across an adjacent field, his shirt flapping in rags about his spare frame, his face looking as though he'd tried to shave with a lawnmower, and his thin, mouse-colored hair falling down over his face, the part owner of the White-Waterman Circus was unmistakably aboard a horse and making time.

No one had any desire to talk for the moment as we just waited for him. I didn't have so much as the beginning of a thought in my mind. I was just waiting and all bodily activity was suspended for the moment. From far off came the din of the circus lot, and somehow in the oil-laden air, the tremendous drive and vitality of that boom town seemed to make its influence felt even out there in the peaceful countryside.

White, his eyes very cold and his hatchet face looking as though it had been a parade ground for a troop of cavalry, reined up his sweating cow pony. He had a big old-fashioned six-shooter at his belt.

"What happened, Mr. White?" I asked breathlessly as I started to help him off his horse, and the others crowded around. For a moment he just gazed at me. Then he swung himself stiffly off his horse.

"Ouch!" he yelled as he hit the ground, and right then and there it was as though some electric wire between White and myself had set off an explosion in my brain.

I reeled dignifiedly, took four large gulps and then endeavored to get my restless Adam's apple under control. It was going up and down like a rubber ball being bounced in an ostrich's neck.

"Sam Sibley and I were talking on the platform of the car—the platform next to the first flat—when some one with a mask on his face, knocks us out before we could do a damn thing!" rasped White balefully. "Heard anything about Sam?"

"He's under a doctor's care in Clayton," I stuttered, stammered, and gulped. "He isn't expected to live. Somebody tried to throw me off my private flat car, too, but I threw him off instead."

"And the next thing we're going to do is to send an airplane up and down that railroad to see if we can find his body," Service put in.

"Must have been the same man," I ventured.

"You've got no business being here!" snapped White. "I don't believe this would've happened if we'd done what we should've done—given in to Harrington and whatever other grafters there are around here—instead of crossing 'em. You and Sam think you're so smart. Well, there's no help for it now!"

AS he climbed on his horse you could almost hear his stiff joints creak. We watched him silently. He certainly looked as though he had fought four fast rounds with a buzz saw and ended up with a little joy ride through a threshing machine. He had a lump on his left eye about the size of half a lemon, colored like a ripe plum. His somewhat exposed body looked as if some artist had got drunk and thrown all his paint over him. I was punch drunk for the moment, reeling under the impact of a sudden inspiration; but, nevertheless, as that thin-lipped, baleful-eyed showman inserted himself into the saddle, I remember thinking that he had plenty of guts. Amos White didn't have to paint any hair on his chest.

"Where'd you get the artillery?" Becker asked loudly.

"Borrowed horse and gun from a puncher up the line," snapped White. "Well, I'm going to get back to the

show. Now that you're here you might as well do your usual program. There will be no parade in Clayton on account of the streets, so you can do your air circus around eleven o'clock."

Without another word, he dug his heels into his horse and galloped away toward the lot, his tatters rippling in the breeze.

"He's certainly shot with luck," stated Groody. "I guess he's too tough to kill!"

For a second, I hesitated. Then I said to Becker:

"How would you like to fly up the railroad with me to see what we can see?"

"Sure," he said heartily and, I thought, a shade eagerly.

"Which ship shall we take, Groody?" I asked.

"Either one. But——"

I stared at him and he didn't finish his sentence. I had darted him a meaning glance, as the poet says.

"Then warm one of them up, will you, Phineas?" I said.

Becker nodded. Suddenly his homely pan was serious and his little eyes very bright.

"I ain't said much because I didn't want to seem yellow," he said, "and I've been kickin' up my heels enjoyin' myself and beatin' up Harrington and all the rest of it. I'm willin' to go through and do anything you boys say. I'm with you hook, line, and sinker, but I'm tellin' you that White's right. We ain't got no business here. The cards are stacked against us. Why not take that two grand and disappear?"

"Do you know anything you haven't told?"

"No, only I kinda feel somethin' in this town. Say, boys, there's wholesale murder goin' on! And I had the feelin' when I first joined Harrington he was crooked some way——"

"Maybe you're right," I told him. "We'll go into a huddle about it while you warm up the ship. After barely escaping getting knocked off twice in the last eighteen hours, I'm about ready to retire to a nice farm near Keokuk myself and listen to the little birdies all day long."

"Think it over," Becker advised. "The crowd is gettin' bigger around the lot and they give me the razz when I come through. They're makin' wisecracks already."

He wandered off and got the mechanic, preparatory to warming up the ship.

"Listen, boys," I said abruptly. "I told you I thought I knew who that egg was last night, and I do. The man that tried to throw me off the train was Amos White!"

For a second, they looked at me as though I'd suddenly turned into the Angel Gabriel.

"By Heaven, you're right!"

Those words fairly crackled from Service's lips. Suddenly Groody was like a living flame.

"But you said this fellow was heavyset——"

"He could have padded himself or something to help him if any accidents happened," I said. "That brittle, rough voice of his—you know, as though he'd been a spieler in the open air a long time—I couldn't miss. When he yelled 'Ouch!' getting off that horse, I knew."

"Good Lord!" breathed Corrigan.

"Now that Slim mentions it, I know he isn't wrong," Service said swiftly, "and it's White who had been begging and pleading to come down here. It's White that suddenly switched and didn't want the border patrol and the flyers to come in at the last minute, and it's White who's in on some scheme that's going to be pulled off by Harrington and his flyers, some big shots in Clayton, and this circus, all acting together!"

"And Sibley told me he might have something to tell me," I pointed out. There was electricity in the ether as we

talked with our heads close together, in low tones that seemed to vibrate with the force of our suddenly steamed-up systems. "White and Sibley went out on the platform or something, and White tried to kill the old man, and thought he had. Then he came up and tried to do the same thing to me. In all these attempted killings, the people protected themselves by doing them under circumstances that would make it seem like an accident."

"He's playing for big stakes, then—and is desperate," Groody interjected.

"What are we going to do about it?" Corrigan said as the motor of one of Groody's ships roared into life.

"My suggestion is this," Service said, starting to polish his goggles. There was a curious effect of inevitability when Tom Service started to lay down the law—a feeling that the conclusion to which he was driving was the only right one and must necessarily be so.

SQUATTING there in a small circle, the morning sun already hot, I'll never forget that meeting of the board. Groody's lids almost closed over his long, narrow eyes, his hawklike face suddenly mirroring all the reckless audacity that was a fundamental part of him. There was heavy-jawed Corrigan, his black eyes unwinking, and a sort of joyous turbulence in their depths; and Tom Service, cool as an iceberg, polishing his glasses while he built an edifice in which each word was a separate brick and not a one was wasted. As for me, I had been born again, as it were. My nose crinkling eagerly, my ears flapping with consuming interest, my tongue, as usual, itching to spout forth a geyser of words, I was having a swell time.

Now that I look back on it, there had come a change in the atmosphere which none of us realized, I guess, until some hours later. All worries were swept from our minds. The past was forgotten and the future didn't extend more than an inch or two beyond our noses. No one had any thought of what was the sanest or most advantageous thing to do for one's own good.

Can you picture me, Slim Evans, an officer of the army and a self-sacrificing government servant preparing to die for his country and his oath of office? Can you picture Service, a light in his eye, determined to smite the foes of law and order, hip and thigh? Can you picture Groody and Corrigan, fine young men, determined that the right should prevail, whether or not its prevalence involved peril to themselves?

Well, if you do you're wrong.

We were just four no-good hellions squatting on the grass with a battle in front of us that we looked forward to for its own sake and with no regard for the good of our souls, the sanctity of army regulations, or the public weal. We aimed to have some fun.

CHAPTER VI.
MACHINE-GUN LEAD.

THE curtain rises again, its dropping having denoted a lapse of some four hours, to find that sterling specimen of American manhood, Slim Evans, spiraling his Fokker down over the airdrome at McMullen.

I was followed in file by the two Groody biplanes, one carrying Mr. Groody and Mr. Becker, and the other one Mr. Corrigan and Groody's mechanic. You are entitled to one or two wonders about why Groody and his pals were a hundred and fifty miles from the scene of the prospective festivities and cash-paying customers so I'll say that we didn't intend to stay there more than about thirty minutes.

Our reasons for being there at all were two. One was to get Groody's ships fitted out with machine guns. The other one you'll become privy to in a minute.

I was first to land, and as I taxied up to the line in front of the huge corrugated-iron hangars, I was greeted by Captain Kennard, who was practically foaming at the mouth. I'd no sooner tumbled out of my ship than he had dragged me to one side.

"You're to call Tom Service at this number right away," he said glancing at a paper in his hand. "He told me considerable. For God's sake, what's up?"

I grinned.

"Plenty," I said, "and you've got to help."

The other ships were landing and I fairly dragged the captain toward headquarters, turning a deaf ear to the importunities of half a dozen border patrolmen who were eating their hearts out in plain sight because they weren't in on the deal.

"Now, listen, captain," I said. "I've got to talk fast. This Becker we've got with us we figure is a skunk masquerading as a pussycat, and so he doesn't know that we know anything about just who our enemies are. We're going to tell him in a few minutes just how much we do know. That is, we're going to tell you the whole story and admit how much we know, for his benefit. The object of that is to trap him into making some move against us so that we'll have a right and proper excuse to jump on him and choke all he knows out of him."

"According to Service," the captain said quickly, "any doubt you have about this Becker being a thug, you can forget. Service said he was poison and to watch him. He'll tell you over the phone."

I leaped up the steps of headquarters like a kangaroo with a shot in its arm. Kennard followed. He gave hurried orders not to let any one inside the building until further notice, and in a few minutes I had a connection with Clayton, 787-M. Tom Service answered.

"Slim," I told him. "Just got in. What's up and, if so, why?"

"Just this," Service's voice hummed over the wire. "San Antonio wired Becker's finger prints to Chicago, and Chicago called up. Becker is really a notorious gunman known as 'Machine-gun Mac' Clancey. He's supposed to have pulled the trigger on at least fifteen or sixteen deceased racketeers, and has been arrested but not convicted more times than you've had drinks. His reputation is not having a hell of a lot of brains; but, because of his entire lack of any ordinary human feeling and all that, he's about as dangerous a man as there is alive. He shoots quicker and with less reason than a tougher and smarter man would. So watch him and get him. He's just a rat with a nice personality."

"O. K.," I fairly sang into the phone. "Otherwise, what's up?"

"Things are sort of wild but funny. The circus lot is swamped already. Tough crowd but good-natured. Show's all on edge, seems to figure that something or other's going to happen. This wild crowd is dynamite that might be set off any minute. The Harrington ships are doing a lot of passenger carrying on our ticket scheme. Every buyer of two tickets gets a ride for a dollar."

"Got yourself a headquarters, have you?"

"Yes," Service told me. "The sheriff's on the level and I'm talking from his house. If anything important comes up and you can't get me, give him the message. He's reliable. Call me again when you get to the ranch. And don't underrate Becker! If I were you I'd see to it that he doesn't have a weapon of any kind at any time."

"O. K.," I said, and hung up.

THREE minutes later, Kennard had given orders to the armament sergeant, and double Lewises on scarf mounts were being installed on the back cockpits of the Groody ships.

Immediately thereafter, Becker, Groody, and Corrigan were cordially invited into the office and I was giving the tongue a little warm-up for some fast and furious speech.

"Say, I'm glad to know you, captain!" bellowed Becker with that wide grin. "Heard a lot about you and this flight."

Probably it was second guessing, but as I looked at him in the light of what I'd learned, I thought I saw the reason why, with all his personality, no one had really become fond of him. When that grin lit up his face, it was with a cold light, like an unshaded electric light bulb, and those diamondlike eyes which glinted so brightly, never became soft.

I hadn't a chance to tell Groody and Corrigan what I'd learned about Becker, but I didn't think it necessary at the time.

"Well, now," barked the captain, "tell me the whole story."

Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking, I accepted the nomination.

The main part of it was nothing that Becker didn't know. He did preen himself proudly when I produced a few sentences indicating that we had accepted him as one of the boys and was sure that he was going to help to the best of his ability. Then, while every other man in the room watched him unobtrusively, I launched forth into the tale from the time that Amos White had come galloping up to our airplanes, panting for breath and all in a lather.

"Right then and there," I told Kennard, "Tom Service and I recognized White as the man who had carelessly tried to toss me off the flat car."

I could see Becker's smile freeze on his face and all of a sudden it was as bleak as a shadow on a glacier.

"So," I went on, "we figured out what we thought was a smart thing to do. We didn't let White know that we recognized him as a plotter in chief, so to speak, of that whole works. What we did do was to go to him, tell him he was right about the presence of our airplanes and me as a border patrolman endangering the welfare of the circus, and said we were going to fly out of town and leave the White-Waterman show to do its business without interference.

"But we left Tom Service behind, which White doesn't know. With the aid of one of the troupers, he is disguised so now that he bows to himself when he looks in a mirror. Wig, mustache, nose glasses instead of horn-rimmed ones, he's galloping around Clayton sheltered by false whiskers, and by this time Federal men are on their way by air from Laredo and San Antonio, to help him investigate. They'll land twenty miles or so outside of town and come in by automobile. We're going to fly back to the Blackton ranch, twenty miles outside of Clayton as soon as we get the guns on.

"Then, after it gets dark, we're going to go up, get high, cut our motors so nobody will hear us or see us, and glide in to a field we've got spotted only five miles away from Clayton. We've got a notion that whatever's going to break may break to-night. If it doesn't, we'll camouflage our ships with mesquite and just sit around and wait for events to eventuate during the week-end. White, Harrington, and the mob think they're safe. The border patrol had better stand by—you can see that it looks big. It would ruin everything now to do anything that would scare off these bozos, but if I'm not wrong, hell may explode with a loud report before this week-end's over!"

A sudden hush! Becker sat there and listened with his face going putty-colored first and from that to a tint approximately like that of bread dough.

"Say, you fellows didn't tell me all this!" he said, and he was like a rat in a trap.

"No, and I'll tell you why," Groody said, his eyes meeting Becker's coolly.

"With so much at stake, we hadn't been sure until this morning that we ought to take a chance on you. Now we know you're all right because you came away with us, so now you know everything we know and you've got a chance to pay off Harrington with interest. I don't imagine you'll be doing yourself any harm, if you're broke, by going on through with this thing and helping stop whatever's afoot."

"Sure! Sure!" blared Becker—and, boy! if you ever saw anybody who was thinking fast and furiously, it was him. He looked as though a whole graveyard full of ghosts had popped up around him.

Even Groody and Corrigan, who didn't yet know what I knew about Becker, winked portentous winks at me as they jerked their heads toward Becker when he wasn't looking at them. The shock he'd absorbed was as obvious as the nose on my face.

WE grabbed a bite of lunch and at one p. m. we took off. Groody was in the front seat of the plane in which he and Becker were riding, and he led the three-ship formation. Becker was unarmed, but nevertheless I perched my Fokker watchfully only twenty-five feet above, to the right and behind Groody's ship, and I never took my eyes off the gigantic killer in the rear cockpit. Groody not only had all the ammunition drums in the front seat, but had mounted a small mirror on the cowling in front of him, the better to watch his passenger. Somehow, I was certain that Becker knew he was suspected, although why I thought that I don't know.

We oozed merrily through the ozone without incident and about an hour and a half later, we were dropping our ships into a big pasture lot from which Blackton, the rancher, had kindly driven about eight hundred cattle for our convenience. Service had arranged that little item by telephone. Every one of us was sure that, before the day was out, Machine-gun Mac Clancey would make a move of some kind; but I was far from prepared for what happened.

Groody was first to land, and in characteristic style that gangling master flyer sideslipped his squat, powerful, two-seated Falcon down over the wire fence, leveled off, and landed within a hundred feet of it.

I dropped the Fokker down in a straight glide, hitting the ground just about as I came even with Groody's ship and rolling fast on ahead of him.

Corrigan, on the other side of Groody's ship, landed about even with me. For a moment, my attention was thoroughly engaged by the knotty problems of avoiding various hummocks, depressions, and other debris. I had to work my rudder like a whipsaw.

As the ship slowed down, I swung it to the right, preparing to taxi over to the northern edge of the field near a small cabin where there resided one of the Blackton employees. This Blackton ranch was a tight little farm of some sixty thousand acres.

Just as I was turning, I thought I heard a motor increase its roar. I looked around and then I jumped as though a bee had stung me.

Crumpled in a heap on the ground, was Groody. Skimming across the huge pasture lot in a direction directly opposite to the one I was traveling, was his ship, chaperoned exclusively by Machine-gun Mac Clancey.

Something seemed to snap in my brain then. Without conscious thought I gave the Mercedes full gun, and with rudder all the way to the right and stick all the way to the left, I turned that Fokker on a dime without letting a wheel go off the edge. I caught it on its turn without cutting the throttle, and an instant later, the Fokker was skimming across the ground in pursuit of the Falcon.

I didn't know what Corrigan was do-

ing and I never even looked at Groody's motionless body. I felt instinctively that he was dead.

Just as the Fokker picked up speed, the Falcon was rising from the ground. As has happened to me once or twice before in moments like that, something happened to me then. Whereas I ordinarily am a timid soul, scared to death of anybody in the world except those that talk a lot about what they're going to do before they do it, I lost all consciousness of fear. And whereas usually my thoughts flow about as fast as a river of glue in Alaska, it seemed as if my brain turned into an ice box full of thoughts that were crisp and clear.

AS the Falcon rose from the ground at least ten seconds before I could hope to get my own ship off, a few thousand different ideas, all of them clear, and in the right place, flashed through my mind. The second that Becker—or Clancey rather—got into the air in a ship with machine guns on it, he had us absolutely at his mercy. He would do something to see to it that our ships were put completely out of commission and that we could hold no communication with anybody. That would be the mildest thing that he'd do. The odds were in favor of his shooting us up and letting us lie—dead men tell no tales. He would probably rush to Clayton, warn his pals, and then beat it to Mexico.

These and a thousand other things all seemed to come to me during those few seconds when his powerful Liberty-motored Falcon was cleaving upward through the air and the feathery little Fokker was just getting its wheels from the ground. I had three hundred yards to go before I'd run into the mesquite, and for some reason I unconsciously kept my little scout hurtling level across the ground, barely three feet high. I had no plan, so far as I know, and yet maybe I had one subconsciously. According to the law of averages, I've done so many dumb things that I'm entitled to intelligence once in a while.

The roaring Falcon was too far away to make a shot anything but abortive. As soon as he turned, I, so much lower than he, would be an easy target even for back-seat guns alone.

Two hundred yards out over the mesquite, my Fokker picking up speed like the wind as I held it close to the ground, Clancey went into a vertical bank. He was about three hundred feet high as he came roaring back toward the field.

Two mental pictures were flashed on the screen of my mind then—one, seeing that machine gun peeking at me from the Beed the afternoon before; the second, Groody's crumpled body lying out there on the ground.

The mesquite was rushing toward me as the Falcon came across almost directly above me. I took one look at it as I eased back on the stick. Clancey was starting to bank, and I could see the double Lewises with their ugly muzzles pointing toward me. A second later, I was out of danger for the moment as the Fokker arched upward with all the excess speed that it had collected in that level dash across the field.

If I had no conscious plan up to then, I got one right there. For that moment the thought of something happening to me never entered my mind.

Onward and upward the Fokker went, curving over in a clean-cut arc until it was on its back possibly three hundred feet above the ground and directly behind the Falcon. Being on your back only three hundred feet high is a slightly parlous position.

As I started my maneuver, he must have quickly straightened his ship and banked it around to the left to get a shot at me. With his back-seat guns he could only shoot at a target to one side of him.

Hanging on my back, entirely forgetful of the fact that when I swooped out

of the loop the end of the swoop would be the nose of the Fokker smashing into the ground, I was squinting along my guns. I could see nothing.

THEN for a split second the bulk of the Falcon loomed in front of me, and I clamped down on the gun control. His guns spoke at the same minute. He was a good flyer but a poor shot. I am, too, ordinarily, but just before my Fokker started to flutter down I watched my tracers pour into him and saw him stiffen in his seat. Then I forgot him as I realized that my last moments on earth had probably come. I had the stick jammed all the way forward to keep the Fokker on its back. Frantically I jerked back on it and jammed on right rudder. At that instant, the nose snapped downward and the Fokker lazily came right side up.

I was a hundred and fifty feet high, the stalled ship rushing for the ground. Well, twenty-five hundred hours in the air ought to teach somebody something, I guess. Likewise any flyer that's alive is good—and I'm alive. Anyway, then and there I was clear-headed for once, and instead of keeping the stick back in the hope that the ship would come out, I jammed it all the way forward to steepen its dive in the wild hope that it might gain speed enough so that I could level it out before it hit the ground.

Twenty feet from the ground, I jerked back on the stick. The Fokker still didn't have speed enough to answer in anything but a loggy manner. Its dive did flatten out, though, and the wheels rammed into the ground at an angle. Wheels are better than the nose to land on any time. At that the tips of the whirling propeller blade cut the grass.

It gave a mighty bounce, going at least fifty feet into the air. I thanked the flyer's gods for the tubular steel construction of that marvelous bus then. The ordinary undercarriage would have smashed in a million pieces and Slimuel X. Evans doubtless gone to his eternal roast.

The wide-open motor picked up flying speed out of that bounce, and as I circled I wiped rivulets of sweat from my face and looked down at the ground with eyes that temporarily saw not, ears that heard not, and a mind that cared not a damn whether school kept or not.

That only lasted a minute, however. As the panorama on the ground soaked in, I yodeled an excited yip. The wounded Clancey had landed his ship safely, and Corrigan had gotten into the air and was circling watchfully over Clancey's Falcon, the mechanic at the back-seat guns. Then I did a tap dance on the floor of the cockpit as I saw Groody walking slowly across the ground toward Clancey who, under Corrigan's guns, was slumped down in his seat as though very badly wounded.

I felt pretty flossy as I came circling down. Being far from a shy and shrinking violet and having a great distaste for wasting my sweetness on the desert air, I'll tell you the truth. In general, I'm an aërial bull in a china shop, who does more stunts trying to fly straight than the average good pilot can on purpose. If I'd tried to do it again, I would jolly well bend my blinking neck. But, gents, that was a pretty fair job, and I was patting my own shoulder as I came down.

CHAPTER VII.

CLANCEY SQUAWKS.

I WAS so busy shaking hands with, and making congratulatory speeches to, myself, that I practically forgot the little detail of hitting the ground safely. Consequently, I made a perfect three-point landing ten feet in the air. The ship dropped and bounced mightily. In fact, it bounced so many times that I thought they'd have to shoot me to keep me from starving to death. Finally

I turned it into a taxi and rolled up alongside the ship I had just knocked down.

Groody was standing about ten feet away from the badly wounded Clancey. Walking across the field toward us, was the bow-legged, mustached old cow-puncher who occupied the cabin.

"How did he get you?" I asked Groody as I got out of the Fokker.

"Hit me on the head with a wrench and threw me out!" barked Groody with abysmal disgust. "And I never took my eyes off him until we hit the ground. If I don't watch out, somebody's going to sell me El Paso!"

"How do you feel, Clancey?" I said, walking forward alongside Groody with my gun on the alert.

He didn't say anything, but his eyes seemed slightly glazed. There was a big bloodstain low and on the right side of his chest.

"I'm hurt bad," he said huskily.

His eyes were different somehow. There was a great fear in them.

What I said then wasn't pretty, maybe, and what I would have done had it been necessary was uglier still. But remember this: they'd tried to kill me three times in the last twenty-four hours, and a bullet or two in Clancey's carcass didn't make him any geranium.

"I can see you're hurt bad!" I snapped. "Now, listen, mister; you can lie out here in the middle of this field and rot unless you talk! In fact, if you don't talk, we'll kill you here and now to put you out of your misery. Do you get that? You stay out here and die unless you spill all you know. We know you're Machine-gun Mac Clancey, a murdering rat from Chicago, but you're 'Popgun Pete' right now, even if you did deliberately bump off the man who tried to kill me yesterday afternoon, to save your own hide. Now, what are White and Harrington and you guys up to in Clayton, and who's your boss?"

For a minute he looked at me, that expression of horror in his eyes. Was he afraid to die? Boy! Then suddenly a sort of cunning, crafty look came into his face.

"What do I get if I do talk?" he said weakly.

"Not a damn thing except whatever benefit the law gives you for turning State's evidence!" I told him. "We don't really have to know anything from you. You know that we know plenty already. If you talk, you'll be taken care of now——"

"And we won't tell anybody that you did talk, if you're afraid of your pals knocking you off," Groody interjected.

"Yes, you'll be protected," I told him.

The two arguments together were irresistible. All this bunk about gangsters never telling makes me laugh. Nine tenths of them are rats at heart and the only reason they don't squawk is because they're more afraid of what their fellow thugs will do to them than they are of the law. Cops tell so many of them they're about to die that even when they are sinking fast they don't believe it themselves and keep their mouths shut because they think they'll live.

For a second, Clancey hesitated. I knew that it wasn't loyalty to his partners in crime. If he could save his own skin, he'd have knocked them all off himself.

"Come on!" I snapped, cocking my gun. "If you don't, I'll put another little souvenir through your shoulder just to show you we mean business. Don't think we pity you, or have any sympathy for you whatever!"

"You've got me down," he said huskily, coughing a little. He wasn't a pretty sight. "The layout is this. There's half a million dollars' worth of dope that Harrington and his men have brought across the border and it's worth three million dollars in Chicago this minute. Most of it will be loaded

aboard the circus train to-night, cached in a lot of places that have been fixed up for it."

"That sounds right to me!" snapped Groody swiftly. "The job isn't hard to get contraband across fifteen hundred miles of deserted country like the border. That's a cinch. It's getting it north that's difficult. They're searching every airplane, and railroad train that comes into San Antonio and——"

"And what a sweet layout—to get it to Chicago on a circus train!" I breathed. "Go on, Clancey."

"There isn't much more," he said in a hoarse whisper. "Some Clayton men will start a 'Hey, Rube!' at the circus lot to-night so's every cop and everybody else will be payin' attention to the circus lot and nothin' else. Some of our men are planted with the show and they'll do the loading. White's attending to all that."

"Who's the big shot who could put up a half million dollars to swing this deal?" I asked as I bent over him.

"Fellow named Dykes in Clayton," he replied. "His right moniker is Peroni. He was run out of Chicago and now he runs all the joints in Clayton. He's connected up with a big ring working out of Chicago and New York——"

HE stopped then and suddenly a mad look leaped into his eyes. He half lifted himself in his seat. "You won't let 'em get me, will you?" he shrieked. "They'll cut my heart out! What could I do, Jimmy? They had me, I tell you——"

Then he stopped as if a hand had been clapped over his mouth, and slumped back unconscious.

"Well, now, that's right interestin'," came the dry voice of Mr. Bogard Towns.

The wizened old puncher pulled at his mustache, which was so big and droopy it made him look like a monkey with a pair of handle bars attached to its upper lip. He was slightly stooped as though the weight of them bent him forward.

"We got to get him to a doctor," I said. "Where's the nearest one?"

"There's one visitin' Mr. Blackton over at the ranch house," he said. "I can drive him over in the Ford."

"O. K.," I said. "Watch out for him, though. He'll be dangerous until he's dead——"

Mr. Towns treated himself to a sonorous snort.

"So he's supposed to be tough, is he?" he inquired contemptuously. He then expectorated calmly and without heat. "In the old days," he stated, "we'd give fellows like him rattles to play with. When I was with the Rangers—when they *was* the Rangers—a couple of 'em could have rode into Clayton and fixed everything up. These days they know more about safety razors than they do about six-guns."

Snorting four more snorts and a couple of contemptuous sniffs, he proceeded to lift the huge Clancey out of the cockpit like a baby, slung the body across his shoulders like a sack of meal and made his way toward the house.

Corrigan was coming down now, but we didn't wait for him. I ran ahead to the cabin and got a connection with Clayton pronto. Tom wasn't at the phone, but I did get the sheriff. I told him the lay, and his deep, somehow reassuring voice, boomed back over the wire with the hint of a chuckle in it.

"That's throwin' a curve around their necks!" he said.

"Now, listen," I told him. "We can't make any false moves. Our object is to let them get the dope loaded and, after everything is all sitting pretty from their viewpoint, to close in on 'em. So don't scare 'em!"

"Don't worry," he said. "Now looka here. That field you're going to land in after dark to-night——"

"Yes," I said.

"Well, I've got a friend of mine in the telephone company to tap a wire, or whatever it is they do, and run a field set out there with some telephone company man there to see that everything works right. So there won't be no rockets or nothin' like that. You'll have the straight dope right over the wire."

"Great," I said. "We'll be there as quick as it gets dark. Until then, we'll be here. How's Mr. Sibley coming on?"

"Service just called up a little while ago," chuckled the sheriff. "And, say! that hombre is a cross between a cyclone and a calculatin' machine. He says that the old man didn't have a fractured skull, that he come to and seemed fit as a fiddle. Service just happened to drop in and catch him before he went out and spilled all the beans. Service fixed it so's the people thinks he ain't got more'n a couple of hours to live, which must relieve White's mind considerable."

I felt great when I heard that. Somehow that white-headed old man and his cane had stumped into a certain recess in me which is reserved for very few people. Sam Sibley was a gentleman and a scholar.

There were a dozen other things that I desired to take up with the sheriff, but I realized that Tom Service had begun organizing things where I would leave off, so I hung up.

It was nigh onto six p. m. Fahrenheit, as Groody and I went out to take care of our ships, meeting Corrigan out on the field. Bob listened to the revelations according to Machine-gun Mac, and grinned a wide and whole-souled grin. His brown eyes were ablaze and his dark, rugged face flushed and glowing. He was kind of a peculiar chap, Bob. Damn good painter on the side and a curious combination of the æsthetic artist and two-fisted roughneck.

"If somebody'll write the story of this, I'll illustrate it," he stated.

"With gestures, I presume," Groody said as he looked over his ship with an expert eye.

Suddenly he emitted a well-rounded curse, bursting with blasphemy.

"This ship isn't going to fly to-night!" he barked. "One of your bullets knocked the battery galley west and another one the timing gear. You and I'll be flying in one ship, Bob."

DARKNESS would soon be upon us, so we decided that it was impractical to ask a border ship to start out. Where we were was hard to find and a landing in the darkness on that rough field meant an almost certain wreck.

"Fine shot you are," scoffed Corrigan. "You were supposed to pot Clancey, not the motor."

"Yeah," said Mr. Groody, "and what does he do? Does he put a nice little bullet in Clancey's heart or brain? No! He flubs it all up and punctures one of his lungs!"

You may gather that we were feeling fairly high. Half an hour later, as we enriched our interiors with some good tequila, we were feeling better.

At seven o'clock we took off. We climbed through the chill darkness to fifteen thousand feet, at which lofty altitude I was shivering until my teeth clicked like castanets. Twenty miles away, the Clayton oil field looked like a swarm of fireflies. The lights on the derricks were like reflected stars, and the darkness screened all that was ugly. It was as though the fireflies were straining toward the great splash of light which the town of Clayton proper threw against the starry sky.

Anyway, regardless of the beauties of nature, we flew about five miles westward toward Clayton, and then, as we picked up three winking lights which marked our field, we cut our motors dead. Silently, like two giant bats, our ships glided that ten miles with only

the song of the wind in the wires to occupy our ears.

We barged down to earth safely and were greeted by an excited young telephone man who looked at us worshipfully. He certainly got a kick out of his job, and felt like a combination of *Sherlock Holmes* and *Robin Hood.* I immediately checked in with the sheriff's wife, both Service and the limb of the law being out around the town. We then took a couple of drinks apiece of the tequila which I had thoughtfully stolen from good old Bogard, and until approximately ten p. m. occupied ourselves with telling lies to the telephone man, taking an occasional drink, and starting our motors to keep them warm.

It was about ten p. m. when the ring of the telephone split the night and made us jump. All four of us dived simultaneously for it and I won because of the length of my arm.

"Get under way fast!" Tom Service said in an orderly rush of words. But underneath his outward calm the spirit of him made me tense. "The clem started on the circus lot and most of the dope is planted aboard the train. Sibley—damn him!—wouldn't stay put. White saw him, and White, this Dykes, Harrington and three or four others are fleeing for the field, evidently to escape into Mexico by plane. Shoot them down if necessary, but try to get them alive!"

"Come on, boys!" I yelled, and barked the news to them as we ran for our planes.

Both the warm motors started on the first try. In less than a minute, we were taking off. We wasted neither time nor speed in trying to get altitude. Two hundred feet high, we roared the short five miles to Clayton at a hundred and twenty-five miles an hour.

I've had my moments during my lifetime but never one quite to compare with that mad dash across a sea of derricks and that blazing town, the cool night air rushing by in a torrent, the twisting silver Rio Grande below us, and three airplanes rising into the air three miles north as we flew hell bent for election down the river to cut them off before they reached Mexico.

CHAPTER VIII.
I AM SHOT!

IT was not until we were due south of Clayton, and I saw those three Beeds climb rapidly as they swung toward the river, that I was able to generate a thought for myself. But when I started I sort of made up for lost time, I guess.

It struck me all of a sudden that certainly every one of those ships had a machine gun in the back seat, and that Service had been unable to take any steps to cripple them because to do so would have aroused their suspicions too soon. If they had back-seat guns, there was only one logical place to attack them from, and that was below and to the rear of them. They would scarcely shoot off their own tails for the sake of potting me.

There was just a chance, I felt that, with us flying low, our dark-colored ships practically invisible except for the flame from the exhaust pipes, they might not even be aware that we were anywhere around. I had guns shooting through the propeller, Groody had just back-seat guns.

We were flying within thirty feet of one another, so I proceeded to do myself some quick and rapid signaling. Groody understood and promptly fell behind as he pointed the nose of his ship up in a steep climb, and I, just west of Clayton, swung north, still only two hundred feet high.

The monoplanes about a mile north of me, flying south, were already four hundred feet high. They were in loose V formation—three dark bulks against the starry sky. I fairly hugged myself as I

realized that they could not have seen me, for they were steaming straight for the border. Had they known other ships were in the air they would certainly have scattered, I felt.

I took time for one brief look back at the circus lot. It was like an angry sea of struggling people. Ten to one the clem was supposed to be a fake—White wouldn't endanger his own show—but it looked to me as if the mob had got out of control.

Then I looked for Groody and it was hard even for me to pick out the pin pricks of light made by the Falcon's exhaust pipes. He was six or seven hundred feet high—a couple of hundred feet or so higher than the Beeds—and now he was working his way northward. We aimed to catch them between two fires.

Now I was directly underneath them and perhaps a mile north of the river. Those dumb clucks, feeling themselves secure, hadn't seen me. Don't think that that's so terribly dumb at that. Darkness, a dun-colored ship practically invisible against the shadowed ground—as I said, it was hard for me to pick up Groody when I was looking for him.

As they thundered along three hundred feet above me, the Fokker, which I had in a shallow dive, was making at least a hundred and sixty miles an hour, the wide-open Mercedes clicking sweetly on all six cylinders. I threw it in a vertical bank and straightened out, perhaps sixty yards back of the formation and three hundred feet below it. Slowly, I pulled back on the stick, squinting along my guns as the little single-seater, with a world of excess speed, angled upward.

At that second, one of the men in the ship alongside the one I had designs on, must have seen me. Quickly it banked and I could see a machine gun appear over the side as the back-seat man stooped down to train it on me. For the moment, it seemed no more important than a bow and arrow as I pressed down on the gun control and sent a shower of lead squarely through the tail of the ship I was aiming at. Just the slightest pressure forward on the stick, my hand still clamped down on the gun control, and the bullets just raked through the bottom of that ill-fated Beed, from stern to stem.

Right then the windshield shattered in front of my eyes and I was knocked back in my seat as it seemed that a red-hot poker had been stuck through my left shoulder. Instinctively I jammed on left rudder and pushed the stick over, the Fokker answering like a shot as I darted beneath the circling Beed. The leading ship had turned now and was swooping down at me, circling to give his back-seat man a square shot at me.

SEVERAL hundred feet higher than the Beeds, Groody and Corrigan were fanning and fogging toward the scene. I never will forget that moment—the sea of lights below, the roar of the five motors seeming to make the universe itself shake, and the feel of blood oozing down my left side. Furthermore, seconds would tell the story now, for two gunners were drawing their beads on me and for an instant it seemed there was nothing I could do.

The Beed immediately above me had banked swiftly, and as it curved around, the muzzle of its gun seemed to give birth to a bunch of dancing red insects. I never knew where the bullets went—none of them hit me—as I threw the Fokker in a right-hand bank, darted underneath the Beed again, and then arched my ship upward in the start of an Immelman turn.

If I live to be a thousand, all the rest of my life won't seem as long as those seconds when the Fokker, an open target, cleaved its way upward in a great arc.

I couldn't know that the leading and highest monoplane had caught sight of

Groody and had transferred its attention from me to the Falcon. I just sat there waiting for some bullet to hit me. It was an eternity before the ship went over on its back, and I turned it right side up with rudder and stick. I looked around quickly. My target was behind me, and just as I shoved the nose down again and banked, bullets zipped through my upflung left wing. Then I saw the lead monoplane, the back-seat man crouched down low, shooting steadily at Groody, who was swooping down like some falling meteor.

The next instant, I brought the nose up, and this time I had my target dead to rights. For a second their bullets zipped all around me, and I could feel the Fokker shiver under the impact as one of them ricocheted off a steel strut. My tracers streaked just above the Beed, but half an inch forward with the stick and my leaden *billet doux* were going true. The back-seat man threw up his hands and collapsed. Just then a great red ball of fire glowed on the ground as if a peephole had been opened into hell. The first monoplane had bit the dust—in fact, it got a large mouthful of it. I jerked the Fokker around in a bank so steep that its propeller almost chopped off its own tail, and I was just in time to see what happened.

In that instant of miraculous mental clarity, I could fairly see old Groody, a cigar clamped in his mouth, looking like some sardonic demon of the upper air as he brought his Falcon down in a dive that must have torn the very breath from his and Corrigan's nostrils. His propeller had been shattered by bullets, and I could see the splintered hub of it revolving wildly. That meant that he'd have to land and land right away—— Why was he diving so terrifically?

At the last minute the steadily shooting gun of the Beed ceased firing and its pilot, probably stunned at the sight of that aërial madman diving straight at him, shoved the nose of his ship down to escape a collision.

I wasn't three hundred feet from him and I saw what happened as clearly as if I'd been in Groody's ship. He changed the angle of the Falcon's dive ever so slightly. The next second, a mighty crash rose above the bellow of the motors and in the light of the bonfire below I saw the Falcon's undercarriage rip through the tail of the Beed. I was paralyzed in my seat. I yelled like a Comanche Indian as Groody shot by me like a high-powered bat making speed out of hell.

The Beed performed about three awkward loops as the shock of that crash sent it end over end. Then it started to flutter downward, finally straightening out in a dive. Just as my second victim, its pilot evidently still conscious, landed and crashed against a fence, Groody's prey came in contact with the ground with no little force. In fact, it was a head-on collision which did no appreciable harm to the earth, but it certainly raised the devil with the ship. For some reason, the gas tank didn't explode, and there the wrecks stayed, its motor sunk in the ground, and its tail in the air—a grisly monument to its passengers.

I saw Groody circling down for a landing in the same field where the second Beed had crashed into the fence. One man was running south, but Groody and Corrigan, without benefit of motor, stopped him. As they circled down for their landing, every move they made plainly discernible in the light of the burning ship, Corrigan poured one burst from the back-seat guns into the ground ahead of the fleeing man and he stopped with some abruptness. Groody and Corrigan could take care of the only man left alive.

You may not believe it, but I'd forgotten that I was wounded as I hurtled toward town, the Mercedes running magically in the cool night air and the

flames streaming from my exhaust pipes like banners of triumph.

And what a sight I saw!

THE literally thousands of people who packed the main streets of Clayton were as motionless as though it was a city of the dead. Every vehicle from lumber wagons to cars had stopped. Out through the fields, the roughnecks were refraining from toil and were standing on the derrick floors. If the sun had been shining the roofs of their mouths would have been sunburned. A dozen boiler mouths were open, glowing redly as the boiler men forgot to stoke them.

The circus lot was a good imitation of the Battle of the Argonne. As I was swooping across it, I saw two men on horses, a long rope strung between them, charge the mob, which gave way before the rope in disorder. The two riders, long stakes in their hands, were laying about them mightily. One of them was Dan Donovan and I could fairly hear him curse as he swung his stick to right and left, riding his rearing horse like a centaur. And just at that moment, as the mob was falling back, out came the elephants from the menagerie tent, a man astride each one's neck.

All around the lot there were individual battles going on between small groups, but evidently the main mob had gathered in one big army and had so far failed to storm the citadel—meaning the menagerie and big tops. What had started as a decoy battle had evidently gathered unto itself many recruits, who were battling with sincerity and enthusiasm.

I brought the Fokker down until it was barely fifty feet high, banked it, and sent it back across the scene of battle. The horsemen had loosened the rope now and were galloping back out of harm's way as the elephants lined up and majestically charged the crowd that was again coming on toward the tents.

As I flashed across that mad scene, what do you think I saw? On old Mazie, leader of the herd, was Mr. Samuel Sibley, plainly visible to the nude optics. He had a pole in his hand long enough to row a boat with. He seemed almost to be standing on Mazie's back as he swung his weapon so fast it was just a blur. His white hair waving in the breeze, his mustache bristling, he hacked his way through the mob like a combination of a *D'Artagnan* and *Jack the Giant Killer*. It was grand to see!

The crowd washed around the elephants, striving to claw their riders off, but those hard-bitten circus men, with that indomitable old man at their head, cracked heads right merrily, their poles and sticks flailing like so many threshing machines.

There was a clear space nearly fifty yards wide, between the menagerie top and the mob seething around the elephants. Rimming the circus lot, twenty deep, and packing the midway, were at least three thousand spectators.

Just then the forefront of the mob, having passed the elephants, started to stream toward the big top. I had just banked around to go back across the lot again, as a fringe of them started in a wave toward the tents. I realized what it would mean if they reached them. They'd destroy for the pure joy of destruction, and the circus would go up in smoke.

I shoved the nose of the Fokker down and in less than two seconds it was barely five feet above the ground as I sent it roaring across that open space. I angled it slightly downward and shot a burst of machine-gun bullets into the ground. Three feet above the earth, the little scout flashed along, and that machine-gun burst had given the crowd considerable pause.

They stopped in disorder. Back of them the men on the elephants, now reënforced by about fifty canvasmen

who swooped in from one flank, were still fighting a battle that kept most of the mob busy.

AT the end of the run, I brought the Fokker up in a wing turn, and a second later it was hurling itself back across that empty No Man's Land. Again I dared a burst of machine-gun bullets, and the leading mobsters simply milled around as though wondering what to do. As I finished that stretch, I turned the ship again. Every mad dash gave the single-seater excess speed, of course, so a quick wing turn was practicable.

As I turned, I saw one lone man darting across that dividing line. Out of the corner of my eye I noticed old Mazie pick somebody up with her trunk and hurl him thirty feet if a foot. It didn't pay to get fresh with Mazie.

Now I was down close to the ground again, the wheels almost scraping the grass, as I aimed for that lone runner.

In a way I hated to do what I did then, but it seemed necessary if the White-Waterman Circus was not to be destroyed. It was time for me to roll up my sleeves, spit on my hands, and give the crowd an object lesson.

Straight for that running figure I went and at the last minute he dropped face downward on the ground. I pushed the stick forward slightly. I felt my wheels bounce off something soft, and as I got the ship under control again, I looked back to find him limp and motionless on the ground.

Just then, at the psychological moment, there came pouring from the big top as wild a collection of fighters as I ever saw. Evidently the kinkers had tried to go on with the performance to keep spectators' minds off what was going on outside, but finally had given it up. So clowns in outlandish costumes, red-coated property boys, candy butchers in white coats, the equestrian director in evening clothes—they came swarming out to answer the call of, "Hey, Rube!" The mob, already disorganized, was now just milling around except for spasmodic fighting around the elephants.

I'd swear there were five thousand people in, around, or streaming toward that circus lot. As this new army came streaming out, armed with everything from elephant hooks to stakes, the men in the forefront of the mob turned tail and fled. They met the rear guard in as wild a whirlpool of people as I've ever seen.

Now the men on the elephants were turning the big beasts around as the mob changed direction and started to flee with considerable celerity and not a little haste. For a moment the elephants, facing the big top, stood their ground as the crowd streamed past them. The showmen tapped passing heads with speed and precision and body after body was strewn along the ground to be trampled by the mob.

But one elephant hadn't changed direction. She was still pointed toward where the show's enemies had been. It was old Mazie.

As the retreating mob washed past the elephants, old Mazie, with a lumbering but amazingly swift run, followed after them. Astride her neck, flailing his pole tirelessly, Old Man Sibley pursued five hundred men. The last picture I got of that grand old-timer that night was of him leaning forward like a jockey, his pole temporarily quiet in his hands because there was nobody to hit, urging old Mazie on as he strove to overtake the mob in the wild hope that he might catch up to at least one straggler and get in a last smack for dessert.

There's a good reason for that having been the last snapshot I took of him. I found out later that a bullet had nicked the motor's feedline, weakened it, and that it had chosen that moment to break. The Mercedes went dead with a couple of tired sighs, and I was directly over

the middle of the lot. I was pretty weak from my wound, and I could think of only one thing to do. I stalled the scout down toward the tiny open space between the back yard and the horse tents.

There were two or three private fights going on out there and a covey of frightened women performers. I didn't want to hit anybody, so at the last minute I banked the ship up, gave it top rudder, sideslipped down, and rammed a wing into the ground. I may have been too weak to put up my arm to protect myself, but, maybe I just didn't give a damn. Anyway, my head came into somewhat violent contact with the spark lever on the side of the cockpit, and Lieutenant Slim Evans checked out then and there in a cloudburst of stars.

CHAPTER IX.
THE BIG SHOT.

I CAME to without outward signs of any resuscitation, because I merely half opened my eyes and didn't move another muscle. There was a lot of conversation going on around me, but before paying any attention to that I tried to make out where I was.

I soon discovered that I was in the hospital wagon. Every sizable show carries such a wagon, plus a doctor. For the minute I didn't want anybody to know I was conscious. I certainly was weak. If somebody had stuck a million dollars in front of my nose, I wouldn't have taken the trouble to reach out and grab it. I just didn't care.

I found out that the wake being held over me was composed of Messrs. Groody, Corrigan, Service, and Sibley, with a fifth man present whom they addressed as "doctor." From the look of his chin he had just finished the third lap on growing himself a medical beard. They were pouring plenty of drinks, but the only one drunk was the doctor.

I produced a weak peep from a throat the muscles of which seemed to be too tired to generate any loud sounds.

"What ho?" I chirped; and five heads turned as though pulled by the same string.

"Don't move," I said hastily. "I'm very comfortable. How did everything come out?"

"G-great!" smiled Service, his eyes glowing through his spectacles.

"Who was the one man we didn't kill?" I inquired.

"Peroni, alias Dykes," beamed Service, "the b-big shot of the whole works. White was killed—he was in one of the p-planes."

My eyes shifted to Mr. Samuel Sibley, whose nose was beaming like a crimson beacon. I observed for the first time that a bandage affixed with court plaster was on the rear of his white-thatched dome.

"You certainly were doing plenty of execution in the clem!" I told him, and the old war horse grinned a slightly alcoholic grin.

"There's life in the old boy yet!" he stated. "How about having a drink?"

"No, no," the doctor protested. "He'sh losht a lot of blood."

For the first time I noticed the fact that I did have a bandage around my left shoulder.

"Well, otherwise how's everything?" I asked without much interest.

"The sheriff got together a posse of about one hundred men," Service said gently, "and about fifty birds that were sticking dope around on the train and who had otherwise incriminated themselves, are all in custody."

"You, being a cripple," stated Mr. Groody, "shouldn't ask too many questions."

He quaffed something that looked like ginger ale and then resumed:

"To sum everything up, all is well in the best of all possible worlds. Not only is a lot of dope confiscated and a

lot of dope runners in the hoosegow, but the head of the Federal bureau in San Antonio has stated in person that he is certain that the government will award to us deserving lads about twenty-five per cent of the wholesale value—Mex—of the said dope. Which certainly gives us an armchair on top of the world."

"By the way," I remarked as all the memories of that crowded night swarmed through my mind, "that was a slick piece of flying when you rammed through that monoplane's tail. How come you didn't bank and let Bob shoot them down——"

"Because I was so damn mad when they shot my propeller off I didn't want to take any chances on a shot missing," Groody told me.

AT that point I decided that I had no more strength to waste in conversation. I did gather, however, from their practically unlimited flow of words, that Service had called the McMullen flight and that there were six army airplanes due to land within the next half hour just to keep the restless town slightly calm and also to have a good week-end in a hamlet that might be said to be wide open.

Clancey, alias Becker, had done the world a favor by kicking the bucket in the Blackton ranch house. This Peroni was apparently a nervous wreck from his experience in the air. These tough guys make me laugh. Anyway, persuaded by certain third-degree methods, he had spouted incriminating facts like Old Faithful, and the Federal government was right then proceeding in Chicago and New York on a round-up of a dope ring that was plenty important. No wonder, as I think it over, that, to those bozos, murder was a minor maneuver. They had about half a million in cold cash invested.

"And as I look at it," the salubrious Mr. Sibley announced himself before I went to sleep, "Amos White just got in over his head. Finally, ruined by the poor season, he figured that bringing some contraband north wasn't so bad, and then it just got bigger and bigger on him. He got more and more desperate, because he figured he was about to be caught, until he just went haywire. I'm certain that when you boys wanted to bring a border patrolman in, he figured he was suspected already—which, in a way, he was. I had no more idea what was up than the man in the moon, but I did know there was something behind his feeling that playing Clayton was the most important thing in the world. A pretty good man gone awful wrong! Thank God he ended up with a good clean bullet hole in him instead of having to go through all the courts!"

Which, I maintain, was very handsome of the old boy.

The bleary-eyed doctor suddenly got wise to the fact that cigarette smoke and noise weren't the best thing for an invalid, so the uproarious gang filled out, me being asleep before they'd got well started. As I say, I was feeling a little too poorly to have any interest in anything. Just loss of blood, which I recovered from within the next two days.

So now, children, you know how it was that Uncle Slimuel got the nice little bullet hole from rushing in where angels would fear to tread.

But I had a lot of fun, so I'm not kicking.

A new Slimuel X. Evans story, by Thomson Burtis, will be featured in the September number of this magazine, on the news stands on August 5th.

Deputy "Bad-ax" Carhart, a Cold-eyed Hellion, Tackles a Raging Black Devil of the Lumber Camps.

BLOOD *on the* SNOW

By JAMES STEVENS

CARHART, the deputy, slogged heavily from the snow-banked river trail into the tote road. Here a packed track ran two ways through the dark boles of the pines. One led southeast, to the headwaters of the Michigamme. The other pointed northward, in the general direction of Lake Superior's Keeweenaw Bay. Carhart swung north after shedding his snowshoes. It was an easy mile track to the Malin lumber camp.

The last gleams of the setting sun were fading in the frost haze of the snow-mantled woods. Bruce Carhart should have looked lucky as he strode on with his pack. Behind him was a two-day battle with the drifts in the threatening solitude of the winter woods. An easy mile down the line were shelter and warmth. But the deputy's gaunt jaws were set like those of a soldier in a bayonet charge, and his eyes were as cold as blue steel. This was a perfectly natural expression, however, for any law officer of this neck of the North Woods to wear when heading into the camp run by "Black Dan" Malin.

Carhart plodded steadily for perhaps ten rods in the hard sled rut of the tote road. Then he halted sharply and wheeled in his tracks. A rough mound of snow in the rut had struck him curiously as he kicked through it. Then his gaze caught the outline of a dark stain. Instantly he swung around to his knees

and scooped away the remaining loose snow with a mittened hand.

"Blood, right enough," muttered the deputy.

He labored up heavily with his pack and surveyed both sides of the road. Each way there were crisscrosses of boot tracks. Evidently blazers for the chopping crew had been tramping back and forth over this stretch since the last fall of snow. The ragged black spot in the tote road might mean no more than a minor accident. A chopper could have fallen here and cut himself on the razor edge of his ax blade.

Carhart grimly shook his head as he stared again at the blood spot. It was larger than two boot tracks. Right here somebody had been hit hard by somebody else who had got his victim away without leaving other signs of a struggle. The blood on the snow had been hastily covered since the last passage of the tote sled.

For a long moment the deputy stared at the ragged black spot, then he covered it again and started on for the shanty camp. The shadows of the woods were thickening swiftly. The pine boughs swayed in a rising wind. Dismal sounds whined from the frozen trees. A small glow flickered redly into view.

"Ninety miles from nowhere," growled the deputy, as he shouldered on into the wind. "One against a hun'erd, and blood on the snow. Here goes nothin', but it goes!"

THE law followed the ax in the pine woods of Michigan. In the wilds of the Lake Superior district gangs of timber pirates slashed at will on public land and in the holdings of those who did not possess the fighting power to resist. When law and order were established in a timber country the rowdies moved on into the wilderness. The Stony River region was still a lawless land.

Black Dan Malin was the king 'jack of the river. Down in the lumber town of Seely he owned the stockade in which the combination saloon, dance hall, and gambling house of the region blazed and roared seven nights a week. But for nine months a year Black Dan left all that to a partner. The man was a cutthroat at heart, but he was also a woodsman. He used his stockade takings and his power to grab timber. Now, ten thousand acres of prime pine were as much as in his hands. He was in possession of the Seely tract on the Stony River. In this neck of the woods Black Dan was the law.

The king 'jack of Stony River swung into the bunk shanty with a two-gallon jug of white whisky. The crew of choppers, swampers, teamsters, and canthook men stared up from their after-supper pipes with expectant grins. Working for Black Dan was not simply hard labor in a winter camp. You got something out of it—solid meals and double wages, hot liquor around the fire at night. You let this black and shaggy bull of the woods make a timber pirate out of you, but you lived handsome and high.

The rising wind outside sucked a column of smoke through the square hole in the shanty roof. On the flat hump in the center of the earth floor the pyramid of logs shot sparks and thrust up savage tongues of flame. There was no other light. The firelight played redly over the bearded faces and mackinaws of the hard-eyed woodsmen circling the shack. All were husky, but Black Dan Malin dwarfed every man except one of that burly crew.

Again and again Black Dan flashed a shifty, scowling stare at "Shag" Radigan, his giant boss chopper. Radigan was smooth-shaven, perhaps for pride in the scars that slashed his right cheek and twisted his mouth. That twist was emphasized to-night as the boss chopper steadily returned the king 'jack's stares.

"What's the funny grin about?"

growled Black Dan, as he passed the jug to Radigan. "Got something on your mind?"

"Maybe. Have you?" said the boss chopper easily.

For an instant Malin's gaze bored into Radigan's eyes, then it shifted uneasily around the shack. The two were near the door. A roar of talk was rising as the raw whisky that had been passed around loosened tongues. For the moment the two were unnoticed, as the gang urged somebody to take the deacon's seat and unroll a song. Black Dan crouched on the bench beside Radigan and thrust his scowling face close.

"If you like yer health, Shag," he muttered fiercely, "you clamp down on them knowin' looks and open up with what ails you. You seem hostile. What's the trouble?"

"Joe Seely," said Radigan, in a cold, flat tone.

Apparently Malin did not move or change expression. But there was a sudden intensity in the bulk of muscle and bone under the mackinaw. Whatever purpose was in Radigan's mind, it now weakened.

"All right," he mumbled. "Don't get on your ear, Dan. I know nothin'."

"Yes, you do, Shag." Malin's voice was cold as steel. "You know what any man in camp does. Last night Joe Seely give me a clear title to the Stony River tract. This mornin' he left with the tote teamster, howlin' his head off about our deal because he was batty and buggy from whisky *blanc*. That's what you know."

"Sure," muttered Shag Radigan, "that's what I know. Nothin' else. Give me a shot, Dan."

Malin passed over the jug. Radigan swung it up on his forearm and drank deeply. He shivered as he shoved the jug back into Black Dan's paws. The boss of the camp still regarded the big chopper with hostility and suspicion.

"I'm lettin' this go," said Black Dan, rising to pass on. "But if you want to keep yer health——"

He broke off there, turning around to glare at the door. The roar of voices around the fire died down as a huge mackinawed figure filled the doorway. His pack thudded down, and the newcomer shook the kinks out of his bulky shoulders.

"Who are you?" rasped Malin. "And what are you here for?"

"Me?" The newcomer faced the bull of the woods with a frank, blue-eyed stare and a good-natured grin. "I'm Bad-ax Carhart from Menominac. Likely you know that there name. It oughter be enough, Mr. Malin, to tell you why I'm in this country and at your camp."

"If you don't know him, Dan, I do!" Shag Radigan roared out as he heaved up from the bench, his scarred face contorted with hate. "Never figgered to ketch up with me here, did you, Bad-ax? But you did, and now we finish what you started!"

Carhart leaped backward as the big chopper charged furiously. Black Dan sprang like a timber wolf and spread himself between the two. His huge paws seized Radigan's arms in an iron grip.

"You gone bats?" he growled. "What's all this about?"

Radigan got control of himself, but his eyes still blazed murderously.

"You let me at him, Dan," he snarled. "This here's the timber beast who ruint me down at Menominac—drove me into these forsaken woods! You stand back, Dan. This here trouble is private."

"You're in my camp," snapped Malin. "You tell me what the trouble is, and I'll settle it."

"You've got a yellow squealer in your camp, that's the trouble, Mr. Malin." Carhart was swiftly shaking off the shock of meeting Shag Radigan. Another high card had turned up in the game he was playing, and he had to bet

on it now. "This Radigan tried to be a river boss down South, and I broke up his drive. Finished him. He crawled out. Couldn't stand the gaff, and now he's squealin' because he thinks you'll back him up!"

"How about it?" Malin growled at the chopper.

"You heard him." Radigan was suddenly cold and expressionless, except for the glitter of hate in his eyes. "Only my outfit run from his gang. I couldn't fight a mob alone. But a chance at Carhart alone is what I've always wanted. Here it is, Dan. You turn me loose."

For a moment Malin hesitated, sizing up the two men. Then he stepped back.

"Go to 'er," he said. "She'll be to a finish this trip."

Radigan's eyes blazed again. He lunged like a mad bull. Carhart set himself, his blocky fists swinging like mauls. The shanty crew crowded around in a close circle. The fighters would have to stand toe to toe and slug until one went down. There was nothing else to do.

A SURGE of exultation swept through Carhart as he saw Black Dan stand back and wave Shag Radigan on. For the time being, at least, he was on luck's trail. On first opening the shanty door for a squint at the prospect ahead he had found himself staring at the back of Black Dan's neck. In the next minute he had caught most of the muttered exchange of talk. Every instinct in Carhart had been aroused to its fiercest force by the sound of Joe Seely's name.

Carhart was on Seely's trail. Here was the situation, as the United States marshal had put it up to him in Menominac.

"Land office graft, that's our trouble. Old Tom Seely was scared to test his title to the Stony River timber in court. He made a gang timber fight out of it and got his head caved in. So this Malin party rules the roost. Starts logging. Then Tom's kid, the Joe Seely you're to trail, comes back here from N'York or some other foreign parts, gets the story, and charges hell-bent for Stony River before anybody knows it. He's just taking a touring trip to sudden death. You're the one bully to stop it; or, if you're too late, to put the clamp of the law on Black Dan Malin."

"Why me?" Carhart had queried, legitimately amazed.

"Birds of a feather," was the marshal's grim reply. "There's plenty in Malin's gang who'll know you for the worst hellion on a dozen rivers down here. You go up there as your regular self, Bad-ax Carhart. Even here nobody'll know you've reformed but me."

"What th'—— Say, it's news to me I'd reformed!"

"No, it's not," stated Marshal Swayne firmly. "For a year you've been a working woodsman. Not one timber fight. You know the law's solid in this neck of the woods at last. When lumbermen battle here these days they go to law, not to hellions like you, Bad-ax, who'll lead head-busting gangs for 'em."

"Right," Carhart had admitted gloomily. "She's tamin' down. Me, I'm perishin'. Just plain work poisons my system."

"And you've been figuring to go up and join Malin's outfit." Marshal Swayne nodded shrewdly. "Well, you're not. Your heartwood's still sound, and you're going to save it, my lad. Incidentally, you'll set up the law in the Stony River country. Your first job is to smash the power of Black Dan Malin and to get him if you can. You can't help it now, Bad-ax."

"I can't, hey? Just why——"

"Because you know a greenhorn kid is heading into a pack of timber wolves, that's why," said Marshal Swayne, with a look that said he knew his man.

"You'll trail him up, Mr. Deputy Bruce Carhart, see if you don't! I get you like this, and I keep you!"

It hadn't been so easy, but Swayne had won. Carhart had taken the trail; and here he was. Too late, it looked, to save the hot-headed fool of a Seely kid, but all set to make a smashing play in the new game that life had handed him.

Bad-ax Carhart was slugging it out with a bully again, just as he had done in a hundred shanty camps. Not a man in the mob that squeezed the circle closer around the two fighters dreamed that the newcomer was any one but the hellion from the Menominac. The growl of Black Dan Malin blasted through the heaving circle.

"Get the yellow squealer! You pegged him, Bad-ax. Beat him, and you boss his crew!"

MURDER blazed in Black Dan's eyes and hammered in his voice. Through the red haze of battle Carhart heard and saw the damned thing. It beat in his ears. Murder in the woods! Blood on the snow! Shag Radigan knows too much! He's the next to smash!

Radigan was feeling it, too. The flush of fighting wrath was drained from his face. Under his stubble of beard the skin was dead white. Radigan's eyes glared with insane desperation. Three times Carhart's fists crashed into Radigan's ribs, battering him back with such force that he would have dropped had the others not heaved him up and on into the ring again. A crazy fury of fear possessed him. His huge shoulders hurled his fists out in a blind storm of blows.

Carhart was caught off balance. He, too, would have been battered down had it not been for the ironlike ring of men. The red haze thickened. Radigan's fists thudded into him like the blows of an ax in dead wood. He had the sense of feeling like a chopped tree that was toppling from the stump and caught in the boughs of other trees. He rolled and sagged, then another burst of fighting spirit blazed up in his heart.

He caught it from the murderous glare of Black Dan, which was still fixed on Shag Radigan.

"Got to," he growled to himself. "Got to win—to get Black Dan——"

He swayed over and down in a crouch. Radigan's wildly flailing blows were hammering the back of his head and neck. For a moment Carhart took them, setting himself, heaving his right shoulder back, his arm hooked; then he drove in with all his weight. His fist shot into Radigan's left ribs like a sledge—right under the heart. The giant chopper went down like a log. The shanty mob squeezed closer. Black Dan drove them back with swipes of his hairy paws. Then he squatted by Radigan's side, ripped open his shirt, and explored with his stubby fingers. Carhart swayed over him. Black Dan looked up with a scowl.

"Only sprung his ribs," muttered the king 'jack, in an unmistakable tone of disappointment. "Looked like you slugged him harder." He got up, his thick mat of coal-black hair towering inches above Carhart's sandy head. "But you're the bully I need," he said. "Bad-ax, hey? All right, you get the choppin' crew."

"What I'm here for," said Carhart bluntly.

But Malin had already turned away and was bawling for somebody to bring the jug of whisky *blanc* and get this here paper-ribbed chopper on his feet. Soon Radigan was staggering weakly to his bunk. He rolled in, his face to the wall, with the look of a man who knew he was doomed.

Again the bunk shanty roared with chesty talk, and the jug swung around the excited circle of men. Others among the 'jacks knew "Bad-ax" Carhart. They gabbed about his hell-raising times down on the Menominac. Black Dan

Malin was sizing him up in a friendly style. The fire blazed and crackled with cheer.

"Two aces back to back," reflected Deputy Carhart. "Couldn't ask for a better start in this blasted law game." But his Scotch caution was on guard. "It's one against a hun'erd, though. Ninety miles from nowhere and blood on the snow."

The ragged black spot out there still haunted him. Again and again the bright, warm scene faded under an image of that trail in the wilderness. He heard the wind whine in the frozen pines. He saw the white track in the gathering shadows, and the sinister dark stain underfoot. At such times he shivered. An open timber fight between rival timber crews was one thing. Murder in the woods was another. Carhart had been a lawless fighter, but he could not stomach a killer like Black Dan Malin. The turn of the cards had put Carhart on the side of the law.

"I've set in to push 'er to a finish," Carhart resolved at last. "Life's a game, no matter how you play it. What's the matter of me playin' from the right side for a change?"

WINTER was deepening in the woods. The sleigh haul had started and the banks of logs were piling up in the river bed. Carhart and his chopping crew were working on the last strip of timber for the season's felling. Its tip ran to the lower side of the tote road, near the spot where he had stumbled on the bloodstain.

For two weeks that discovery of his had haunted the deputy from the Menominac. At times the suspense was well-nigh intolerable. He could make no move until the tote teamster returned with the last load of supplies that would be brought in before the spring breakup. Then Malin's story of what had happened to Joe Seely would come to a climax.

A heavy atmosphere of suspicion brooded among the men of the shanty camp. All were hard characters of the woods and lumber camps, with scant respect for the law. They were ready at all times to back up Black Dan in a fair battle. They would work in pirated timber and drive down the logs. Not a man cared a rap about Malin loading Joe Seely with raw whisky and cheating the kid into signing away his timber rights. Black Dan was one of their kind. Seely was a greenhorn in a boiled shirt.

Just the same, these bully woodsmen could not stomach red-handed murder. Carhart knew it, and so did Malin. The latter had a story about how he had loaded Seely on the tote sled that morning after the men had gone to the woods.

"He was still bats from the licker I'd welcomed him with. Couldn't hold the stuff. Wanted to battle about the fair deal we'd made. But I let it pass. Loaded him up and sent him off with a grin. That's all. If Seely wants to go back on what he signed and make a fight out of it, then we'll battle him. Hey, men?"

That was the story known to all the 'jacks in camp. Only Shag Radigan seemed to know more. There was a good deal more, Carhart was certain. But it would never be squeezed out of Radigan, as the big chopper was now. He was broken with his fear of Black Dan. Beaten and admitted it.

"You don't grovel good, do you, Badax?" was his one word to Carhart after their fight. "Well, you will, or Malin will get you like he's gettin' me."

"You're all right," Carhart assured him. "It was a fair fight. Let's shake and call 'er all square."

But Shag Radigan had figuratively crawled into a hole and pulled the hole in after him. The fear was in his eyes. He had no hope of getting out of the Stony River woods alive. That was plain.

"But he will," vowed Marshal Swayne's deputy. "I'm bettin' my last chip he knows what the law needs to know."

Carhart worked and waited. In each frosty dawn he had his axmen lined up in the felling strips, and with a blocky Frenchman for a partner he set a hard pace in the lead. The labor hit him where he lived. Heart and hide, Bad-ax Carhart was a woodsman. The feel of a hickory handle in his mittened hands, the pull of the swinging blade, its lusty ring as it bit through pine bark, the surging crash of a felled tree, the stirring smell of green boughs, the bracing drive of a clean cold wind heaving off the snowdrifts—all this was the zest of life at its best for Carhart the woodsman.

But he also had the restless spirit of adventure and the white-hot glow of battle in his heart. That had made him a lawless pine woods rover. He had to make life a dangerous game. Never in the day's work in the woods did Carhart forget that he was here to take the scalp of Black Dan Malin.

The choppers were knocking off work at twilight when the tote team plodded into view amid the black boles of the pines. Carhart started the crew on for camp.

"I'll be in later," he said. "Want to pace off what's left of the strip before I start."

THAT was all right with the choppers. They shouldered their axes and angled through the slash for the camp trail. Carhart turned his back on them and struck swiftly through the standing timber. By the time he was at the tip of the strip the shadows were thickening fast. He squeezed his frame against the trunk of a pine and waited for the tote outfit to draw near. He was directly opposite the spot where he believed Joe Seely to have been struck a murderous blow.

The sheeted load bulked high behind the four plodding horses. It would be mainly feed for the sleigh teams. The tote outfit would now be held for sleighing until near spring. The teamster would be in camp.

Three men—Malin, Radigan, and the tote teamster—knew what had happened to Joe Seely along this lonely road in the winter pines. From one or both of the last two Carhart would have to get the evidence that would clamp the law on Black Dan for keeps. Right now he was curious to see how the teamster would react as he neared the spot where blood had been spilled.

The man on the sled seat was straightening up. But it was not for a look overside at the road. Instead, he was staring into the thick boughs of a roadside pine. The drooping needles of one big bough brushed the top of his load. The teamster sank back into his seat. His lash cracked. The horses lunged on.

"Right over the spot," muttered Carhart. "Why didn't I see it before? One bright light of the law, I am."

For a moment he stood motionless, his gaze never leaving the pine by the roadside. Many others towered along the track, but this one now stood out for the mass of boughs that jutted over the road. Carhart shifted the ax in his hand. His gaze dropped to the bright blade. Then he turned to the timber and sized up the trees. Ten strides brought him to a sapling, its lower boughs within five feet of the ground. Carhart swiftly felled it, and then slashed off the limbs so that stubs a foot long were left on each side of the slim trunk. Now he had a twenty-foot woodsman's ladder. He shouldered it and drove through the deepening darkness for the roadside pine.

The camp supper was over. The last 'jack was in from the sleigh haul and settled by the camboose fire. Bitter weather was brewing in the woods out-

side. The wind battered the roof and sucked savagely at the blazing logs. The men crowded close to the fire, waiting for Black Dan and his whisky *blanc*.

Carhart was in his bunk, which was just above the shanty door. From its shadows he could see Radigan's bunk, the next one below the door, and he also had a full view of the camboose crowd. Shag was also sprawled in his blankets. Every so often Carhart saw the dim bulk there shake as though gripped by a chill. There was a sort of grim intensity in every man to-night. Soon Black Dan would break the news of Joe Seely's fate, whatever it was. The tote teamster, "Red" Shaler, had refused to talk.

"The bull's orders," he said, meaning Black Dan. "You'll hear soon enough from him."

Murder in the woods. After his exploration in the pine, Carhart was surer than ever of the end of Joe Seely. Of course Black Dan and Shaler had a proper story rigged up. Most of the men here were roaring hellions, as he himself had been, as he still was at heart, no doubt. Ready to gang up under any bully leader and battle another gang for a section of timber or a river right of way. Never balking at a killing in a fair open fight. But they could never stomach the cold-blooded murder of a defenseless kid, not for all the timber on Stony River. Black Dan Malin certainly knew that. Carhart waited for the timber pirate's story.

It was roared out defiantly after the second round of raw whisky. The 'jacks were mellowed and warmed. The circle of stares was friendly and admiring as Malin set his hairy fists on his hips and started to talk. Shaler, the hawk-faced tote teamster stood at his right, nodding solemn agreement with every word. The plunging flames of the camboose blaze shot red flashes over both men. They revealed the staring eyes and scar-twisted mouth of Shag Radigan as he leaned from his bunk, listening.

"A big wind that day, remember," rumbled Malin, in a tone which dared anybody to dispute him. "First day out of camp a widder-maker blowed down on the tote outfit. Shaler dodged down between his wheel hosses. But the kid was still too rummy from the licker he couldn't hold. The limb caved in his head."

Black Dan paused, his jaws set hard. His glare swept the circle, daring any man in it to speak. The burly 'jacks blinked uneasily at each other, nervously shuffled their feet, but said nothing. Malin's story sounded straight enough. A "widder-maker" was the woodsman's name for a broken pine bough. A man never knew when one might be blown down and smash him.

But the shanty gang was uneasy. They knew Black Dan had poured whisky into Joe Seely until the lad was drunk enough to sign his name to anything. Once out of the way, what he had signed would stand. Somehow, it seemed that a limb had blown down mighty conveniently for Black Dan.

"He never knew what hit him, hey, Malin?"

Black Dan swung around, scowling, as Carhart asked the question.

"What are you gettin' at?" Suspicion glittered from his deep-set eyes. "When a big limb drops on your skull you know nothin'." With another menacing and suspicious glare, Black Dan turned back to the gang. "Shaler done all he could for him," he said. "Tied up his head, fixed him a bed in the wagon, and drove hell-bent for town day and night. But it was no use. Hey, Red?"

"No use," echoed the tote teamster. Carhart was not the only one who noted the strain in his high-pitched voice. "The kid hung on till I got nigh to town. Jest too long a drag. The coroner called it accidental death."

"You heard him, men." There was a challenge in Black Dan's growl. "Accidental death. Tough, hey?"

There was a moment of profound silence among the men. The wind boomed outside and the blazing logs crackled. Carhart slowly eased up to his feet, his eyes on Radigan. The big woodsman was regarding Malin with a set stare, while he nervously licked his dry lips. Plainly he was trying to force himself to act. The 'jacks were waiting for a move from somebody. Black Dan and Red Shaler exchanged worried looks. Their play was not going over so well. Few of the men here were simple enough to swallow that talk about the coroner. That party was merely one of the Malin's hired hands down in Seely. Mentioning him had deepened the sense of some brooding evil.

"Tough, you bet," ventured Malin, his hard stare shifting from man to man. "Right after we'd settled our argument peaceable, too. Well, can't be helped." He heaved his huge shoulders as though tossing off a burden. "What do you say to another round of whisky *blanc?*"

He swung out the jug. A great sigh surged around the circle. Malin's wolfish grin gleamed again. The 'jacks were taking it. His bluff had won. There might be plenty of bad talk about this business, but, once his own gang had decided to let it go, Malin was satisfied. He turned his head to wink down at Red Shaler. As he did, Bad-ax Carhart spoke softly in his ear:

"A great bull of the woods, Malin. So good you can get away with murder —and ain't that a fact, now?"

Malin's grin was twisted into a snarl. But before he could speak the jug was jerked from his hand and heaved at Shag Radigan.

"You take the first drink, Shag!" Carhart's voice battered the shanty walls. "And this is what you drink to—blood on the snow!"

The jug rolled from Radigan's shaking hands. Then for a second his eyes stared frantically at a wolf-trapper's club swinging like a pendulum from Carhart's hand. He sagged down, as the club fell at his feet, his fingers clawing over his eyes. Carhart swung around on the crowd.

"Now who do you think did for Joe Seely?" he roared. "Take a look at Radigan! And at Shaler there!"

RED SHALER was cringing behind Black Dan Malin. The timber pirate was standing as though paralyzed by the rapid turn of events. But he came to life as the gang started up from the camboose benches, growling and muttering. His bluff had been called. It was a show-down here. But he knew his men and he was sure of his own might.

"Back up, you hellions!" his fierce rumbling growl beat into the crowd. "Are you lettin' a bully like Bad-ax Carhart roil you up against me? You know him for a timber wolf. All right, you leave us to settle this, man to man, here and now. When we're done, then Shaler and Radigan can talk. Clear a ring there!"

"Let them talk first," demanded Carhart. "Then I'll battle you from here to Mackinac."

"Yellow, hey?" sneered Malin. "They can't run off. If there's been a killin' I want to know it same as you do. But you don't hook me in on it. Not without a battle."

It was a fight. There was nothing else for it as Black Dan let fly with both fists and drove up a boot for a groin kick. Carhart leaped back to set himself. In the instant he read the verdict in the hard faces circling close. The law of fist and boot was the only one in these woods. Malin had appealed to it, and Carhart had to meet him on his own ground. Neither Radigan nor Shaler would talk until Black Dan was beaten

down. Nor would Malin's men turn on him unless red-handed murder could be proved against him. Carhart saw it, and he let himself go.

He was no longer a deputy of the law as he met the furious charge of Black Dan Malin. Nor was he even the avenger of Joe Seely. The spirit that blazed up in his heart was that of the notorious Bad-ax, the hellion of the Menominac country. He stood here and slugged to show the hard and lawless 'jacks of the Stony River woods that he could stand toe to toe with their bully and batter him down.

The timberland wind beat around the shanty in rising blasts. Waves of flame surged from the camboose logs until their tongued crests nearly touched the roof. Red flare after red flare swept the room, bursting over shaggy heads, bearded faces, staring eyes and heaving mackinawed shoulders in vivid flashes. Black Dan's coal-black mat of hair towered over all. His deep-set eyes furiously reflected the red glare of light. His whole expression was inhuman, contorted like that of a beast on the kill.

Bad-ax Carhart was no better. His gray eyes were as coldly murderous as a wolf's, and the bush of sandy hair bristled from his head. His mouth dripped blood from a pair of solid smashes that Malin had hammered in with his first charge. Bad-ax did not know it. Blood now made no difference. All that mattered was to hold up under the blows of the raging black devil before him and to batter him down. Fist and boot! There is no other law deep in the woods.

Here men revert to the primitive. In these riotous moments all the 'jacks swaying in the red glare of the shack fire might have been a tribe of a prehistoric age watching two chiefs battle for the power over all. Everything fades from their minds save the fury of the fight.

IT was furious, even for a timber country slugging battle. The men were a perfect match for each other. Black Dan had the weight to stand up under solid blows and to give killing force to his own swings. Bad-ax was a tough timber of a man. He swayed and sagged under the impact of Black Dan's smashes, but he snapped back again to chop at the bigger man's middle with slashing swipes of his knotty fists. Then a solid swing would land and hammer him back again, but before another could strike he would be chopping over and into Black Dan's ribs.

To Carhart all sense of place and time were lost. He was fighting instinct, and nothing else. Before him was a black thing to beat down, which swept hard fists at him that did not hurt when they struck, but kept from realizing a desire that blazed through him like an actual flame. That desire was to feel his own fists striking with shocks that electrified him into yet more furious effort. He exulted in all a hurricane of feeling.

The old fight! Toe to toe! Bad-ax Carhart of the Menominac was living again!

That was the spirit surging in him until he did not even think if he were winning or not. He simply had to fight on like this until the fire died down.

Suddenly it blackened with a paralyzing shock.

A freezing and sickening pain clamped his midriff. In the instant that he sagged back Carhart's cold sense returned. He saw what was happening with a clear vision. Black Dan had met his last chopping charge with a driving boot. It had struck like a sledge. He could see and know, but he could not move. His knees buckled as the men behind shoved him up. Black Dan was lunging in for a finish.

Then something was shoved from behind and waved before his eyes. The wolf-trapper's club—and Shag Radigan was yelling crazily:

"Give it to him! Let Black Dan get his own blood on it there!"

He still could not lift a hand. But Black Dan had stopped as though he had butted a stone wall, his fists dropped, and he stared witlessly at a rusty splotch on the white peeled stick as a flash of red light glared over it. Black Dan was remembering what he was fighting for. He stopped to think and then Bad-ax Carhart struck him like a falling pine.

A fist for a boot. His strength blazed back, and his one wide sweeping swing was charged with all of it. Black Dan Malin simply buckled up and went down. Carhart swayed over him, a savage snarl rising from his swelling throat.

"Get up and take 'er, Malin! We're not done yet; not us—not two timber beasts—till one of us is clawed clean apart!"

But Black Dan was dead to the world. He had lived too many high seasons in his stockade to rebound from such a killing blow. Carhart swayed back. His hand numbly touched his face. He stared dully at the red dripping fingers. Then he heard Shag Radigan:

"Now you'll listen—now you'll know what all this hell was about! Black Dan had me foul for something I'd done down south. I helped him and Shaler make the timber steal from Joe Seely. I knew they killed him, but I wasn't in on it. I just know Dan roped himself up and waited in that tree a mile out for the tote sled to pass. He swung down on the kid with that club, then hid it in the limbs."

"Where was you? How did you know?" Voices roared at him.

"I got skeered of a killin'," Radigan groaned. "Cut over from the choppin' crew to foller the tote sled. Wanted to ketch it and see the kid come out safe. It was out of sight when I saw Black Dan swing down from the tree and start coverin' "—his voice shivered into a crazy wail—"blood in the snow. Pore Joe Seely——"

"Rope up Black Dan!" That was the roar from a dozen men as the gang milled for the fallen timber pirate. "String him up to a pine and let him hang all winter!"

"No hangin' this trip," growled Bad-ax Carhart, standing over Black Dan, the telltale trapper's club swinging from his hand. "In the mornin' Shaler takes Radigan, Malin, and me down the Deer River trail to Menominac." He grinned painfully at the gaping mob. "Me, I just now happened to remember I'm a officer of the law."

Watch for more stories by James Stevens.

A POT OF GOLD

MANY are the valuable archæological finds that have been made by the lowly laborer. Priceless statues have been unearthed by workmen, buried cities have come into the sunlight as the clink of some battered shovel sounds against an ancient, muddied cornice. Art, history, and science have been richly served by nameless men whose sun-browned arms have wielded picks in new-made excavations.

Of inestimable archæological worth is the recent discovery of a pot of gold in Jugoslavia, cast up by a workman much as the digger casts up *Yorick's* skull in "Hamlet." Of earthenware, the pot is crammed with pieces of gold which go back in time to the second century, B. C. It has been hazarded that the relic may be traceable to Hannibal, who may have passed that way during the second Punic War, on his historical march on Rome.

Son of a LEGIONNAIRE

By Captain LEIGHTON H. BLOOD

Father and Son—the Legion of Strangers—a Moving Drama of Family Honor That Knew No Halfway Mark.

THE old man paused for a moment to watch a group of bare-waisted legionnaires at work on the base of the monument that would commemorate a hundred years of existence for the *Légion Etrangère*. The sergeant in command of the workers, a German, clicked his heels and respectfully saluted.

"All goes well, *mon sergent?*" he asked, leaning his body ever so lightly on the strong stick he carried in his right hand.

"*Oui, mon colonel,*" replied the sergeant with a smile. "The monument will be complete long before the great day arrives. As you know, we are now laying the base that will last a thousand years, as I hope the legion itself will last!"

There was infinite love and respect in the sergeant's words—the pride of a real soldier for his corps. Ten years ago he had been a *feldweble* of machine gunners on the western front. To-day he was a legionnaire, which was the answer.

"I, too, hope that the *Légion Etrangère* lives a thousand years, yea, ten thousand," said the old man softly.

For a minute or two he continued to survey the soldiers in the excavation for the monument that would rise above the square in Sidi Bel Abbes. It was at the head of the street that leads up from the P. L. M. railroad station and the junction of the one that sweeps along by the great headquarters of the Foreign Legion. The day was getting on.

"I hope that I live to see the dedication, my little one," said the old man, turning toward the big building that houses the officers' club of the legion. "But many months will pass before it is complete."

"You will live, *mon colonel,*" the sergeant hastened to assure him. "Who, more than yourself, would we legionnaires wish to be present on that great day? Yes, you will be with us, never fear. You, too, *mon colonel,* are a legionnaire!"

The other's spare frame stiffened, and his shoulders squared. A smile quirked up the corners of his drooping white mustache.

"A legionnaire!"

He said it reverently. Then his thin hand came up to salute, and he walked away toward the club.

The sergeant, suddenly at attention, stood motionless staring after the retreating figure in civilian clothes for half a minute. At last, turning back to his detail, he saw a corporal staring at him, and, knowing that the other had been listening to the conversation, glared at him.

"Attend to your work, you dissolute son!" he growled. "Who, I ask, has a better right than Colonel Regniac to take part in the dedication of this monument to the legion? His very heart goes in each stone!"

The corporal grinned. He was holding a stone mason's hammer in his hand. At some distant time before he came to the Legion of the Strangers he had been a worker with stone.

"All is true that you say of the colonel," he retorted. "But your face, *mon sergent!*"

"My face?" asked the puzzled German.

"You had the look of a pious monk when you talked with the old one," he laughed, "when every one in the legion knows that you worship only wine and the women in the district."

"Any more out of that big mouth and you sleep in the *Poste de Police* for the next four days!" snapped the sergeant. "Get back to work!"

THE sergeant, in spite of his legion reputation, was most sentimental, and he knew that the corporal had no doubt spoken the truth about his monkish appearance as he talked with the old man. The story of Colonel Regniac was one that was close to his heart; one of the epics of the legion. Did he not recite it time and time again to the recruits to show them the spirit of the *Légion Etrangère?* The name Regniac had its little niche in the *Salle d'Honneur* down the street behind the wall of the great caserne of the legion.

He saw that the colonel had turned into the palm-covered walk of the officers' club, and he shrugged his shoulders and went back to his job of supervising the others.

Joseph Pierre Marie Aristide Regniac, colonel of infantry, retired, residence Sidi Bel Abbes, Algeria, walked through the garden surrounding the club and up the steps. A legionnaire in white jacket took his hat and stick. Without recourse to the clock in the hall the soldier knew that it was exactly four thirty in the afternoon, for punctually on that minute the old colonel came to the club.

In the big room on the left a dozen officers were scattered about. Some were playing bridge, others talking, with drinks in their hands. All bowed as the old man entered, and greeted him in respectful if formal tones.

There was something regal about the way Regniac made his quiet walk from group to group in the room, politely exchanging low-voiced greetings and extending his hand in the time-honored greeting all officers of the Foreign Legion observe, although they happen upon one another a dozen times in a day. But Regniac was of the old nobility and had only dropped the "de" before his name when he came out to Africa and the legion.

Through the folding doors into a far room could be seen the daughter of an officer seated at a big grand piano, under instruction of a simple soldier of the legion who, before his enlistment, had been second conductor of one of the world's best-known symphony orchestras. Last of all the old man approached them, and smiled down.

"Music, my little ones, is one of the great compensations of life," he said. "Heed well the teaching of your legionnaire, *ma petite,* for he is a great musician," he added, patting the child's head. "Some day, perhaps, he will write a symphony of the legion as he wrote others before he came to us."

The soldier smiled and bowed to Regniac. Save for his olive-drab uniform it was the courteous appreciation of an artist to a lover of art, not that of a private of the second-class attached to the *premier musique* to a retired regimental commander.

"I am working on something," he admitted. "I hope it will meet with your approval when complete, *mon colonel.*"

The old man bowed again, returned to the big room, and walked to a small table beside a window. Unbidden, a white-jacketed legionnaire attendant came with a vermouth cassis and set it before him. By its side he laid the latest copy of the *Petite Morocaine* of Casablanca.

Regniac picked up the paper to learn the latest gossip of Morocco and what was going on in the far High Atlas across the border. This was his daily routine; his existence until that monument down in the square, inscribed with the names of its heroes, was completed. After that—well, who could tell?

A YOUNG lieutenant, the twin gold markings on his cuffs so new that they sparkled, turned to the tall officer with whom he was drinking, with an inquiring look. The youth's left breast was bare of ribbon loops. On the contrary the tunic of his companion had a row and a half of loop threads; but the ribbons, as is legion custom, were absent. Those were worn for official occasions only, just as the Sam Browne belt is put aside by commissioned officers of the corps when they are out with their regiments.

"Who is the distinguished old one, my friend?" he asked, nodding slightly toward where Regniac sat reading.

"Colonel Regniac, retired from the Fourth Regiment at Marrakech," replied the other.

"But he seems quite alone," insisted the young man. "And no one asked him to join them or to take a hand at bridge. There are two majors over there, for instance, who but nodded their heads and shook hands, and it is obvious that he is their social equal; yes, by far their superior, if I know anything of society."

The lieutenant of the decoration loops looked at his friend quite soberly, and then shrugged his shoulders.

"There are things, my little cabbage, that are not taught to you in St. Cyr, or that you do not learn in two or three years with the metropolitan regiments in France," he said quietly. "If you live very long in the *Légion Etrangère,* you will discover some real truths about life."

The younger man had suddenly grasped the sleeve of the other's worn tunic in a nervous grip.

"Look!" he whispered. "He is talk-

ing to some one at the table and there is no one there!"

It was true. The old man had looked up from his paper and was talking across its top to the empty chair on the other side.

Fascinated the young man watched. He saw Regniac lift his aperitif, hold it before him, and take a sip.

It was only the voice of the other that drew away his eyes.

"The colonel has seen the item that the sixth battalion of the Fourth Regiment outpost on the grand caravan trail beyond the M'Touga pass has put down a dissident tribe, with little loss," the lieutenant said. "It is on the second page of the paper."

Then the new man saw that none of the others in the room were paying any attention to the old man at the table.

"Is he *cafard?*" he asked in a low voice.

"Would that I had his brain!" said the other. "No, Colonel Regniac is perfectly sane, at least as far as the legion is concerned, although those who do not understand might think otherwise."

"But the old one sits there carrying on a conversation with an empty chair, and raises his glass for a toast," insisted the new officer. "I cannot understand."

"How do you know that the chair is empty?" asked the older officer, without any attempt to conceal the irritation in his voice. "Did I not say that in the *Légion Etrangère,* if you live, you will learn about life—and death? If you knew about Regniac, then you might understand—a little."

"And you will tell me, my friend?" asked the newcomer eagerly. "I have seen enough to know that here is a tale; such a one as we read about of the *Légion Etrangère* and never believe."

The other man seemed to be considering the glowing end of his cigarette. After due consideration he pulled the right leg of his slacks up a few inches and propped a foot easily in a chair.

"What I tell you now," he said quietly, "is of the legion. In the family. Perhaps it will make you understand what the real legion, underneath citations, and the brainstorms of writers, is all about. You have said that you intend to make the legion your career, and not return to a metropolitan regiment at the end of two years. Is that correct?"

The boy reddened a bit at this, and reached for a cigarette.

"I intend to make the legion my career," he said in a low voice. "Is that enough, my friend?"

"Then you hear the story of the House of Regniac," decided the older. "It may make you understand us all."

IN 1914 Regniac was a major of the *Chasseurs Alpin* in the fortress near Grenoble.

The rank of major in those days was very high. Marshal Foch, even then an old man, had only recently been promoted to a full colonel. To-day we stumble over a horde of majors who would have been mere lieutenants then.

There was a son—named after his father—who had just entered St. Cyr. Yes, the majors in those days were of an age to have sons in St. Cyr, as I have pointed out.

To understand it all you must consider that there has always been a De Regniac in the armies of France since there has been a France. It is a name that has an unblemished military record.

"You, my son, must continue the tradition," Regniac the father said on the night that the boy set off for St. Cyr. "The enemies of France, at this very moment, are preparing to make war. The Regniacs must be ready!"

They were in the old man's quarters in the fortress. All the boy's life had been spent among soldiers. He had been hearing for many months the talk of the war to come. Whether he believed, no one knows.

"I do not wish to be a soldier, *mon père,*" said Regniac, the son, that night in Grenoble. "Instead I would rather go to the conservatory and study music. The writing of a symphony is of more importance than all the armies of the world. It is something that will always live. You, yourself, admit that I am a good musician, and with training should succeed. Come, allow me to decline the appointment."

You can readily understand that this must have cut Major Regniac to the very heart. Here was a son who refused to carry on the glorious name—sneered at the profession that had won honor, glory, and, in the years gone by, a fortune to the House of Regniac.

The old man's quarters were Spartan, as behooved a *commandant* of the famed *Chasseurs Alpin.* On the walls were pictures of other majors and colonels of the battalion who had gone before, some in the War of 1870. The elder Regniac's eyes swept over them and then toward his only son, who stood before him now.

Remember that this boy had been raised among soldiers and was now on the threshold of a military career, and therefore he was standing very straight there alone with his father. He might have been a *chasseur* at attention before his commander.

"It is my wish—and my order—that you proceed by to-night's train to Paris and enter St. Cyr," said the father. His voice was low, for he was one of the quietest-spoken officers who ever served France. Only his jaw had tightened, and his lips were a trifle white.

For perhaps a minute the son stood there observing his father and not uttering so much as a whisper. Then he laughed, a hollow, cynical sort of sound, more like that of an hysterical woman than the son of a soldier, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Très bien, mon père!" he capitulated in a voice pitched high with emotion. "I will be a little soldier to please you. But it is not my wish, and if I am not a good soldier it will be because you have made me into one against my wishes."

Psychologists would say that Major Regniac should have known then that all would not be well.

"Always remember, *mon fils,* that the honor of the House of Regniac is in your keeping," was all he said.

Very simple and terse, you will agree. A soldier's words.

With that he shook the boy's hand and rode with him to the station.

THE war came, as all had expected. Major Regniac with his *chasseurs* was in the thick of the very first fighting. The boy was at St. Cyr. After a few months it was decided that likely cadets be sent into regiments that were in need of officers as *sous-lieutenants.* In those days, my friend, there was need of trained leaders and a boy with a year's training at St. Cyr knew at least the rudiments of leadership.

Those who had the duty of picking the men who would be given immediate commissions saw the name "De Regniac." That was a name well known in the army and they quickly saw that this was a son of Joseph Pierre Marie Aristide de Regniac, now a lieutenant colonel, and in hospital recovering from a wound. So they made a check against his name on the *cadre* of cadets and he was awarded a commission.

They sent the boy to an artillery regiment, and Colonel Regniac was glad. It was safer there than the infantry, and, no matter what you say, no father wants to see his son die. For a year Regniac the son was a good officer for one so young, but then, he had spent his life in casernes. Then came a leave in Paris, and with his handsome appearance and musical ability he was much in demand in the salons of important people. His own social position was an assured one.

He was tall, like his father, with chiseled features, and a swagger—one who made the heart of every woman he met beat a little faster. In those days, too, Colonel Regniac was handsome, and in spite of his years his hair was black. He looked like an elder brother and not like a father.

Through a lady the boy was assigned in Paris.

No, he never saw the front again. He became an *embuscade* officer. He was wise enough to make his feminine friends among the powerful, and through their husbands, high in the war councils, his orders were for a permanent billet in Paris. Yes, he was a proper one for dancing and for afternoon tea.

How did his father feel? How would any father? But at least the son was in uniform and had been at the front for a year.

It was in the winter of 1917 that things happened. Colonel Regniac was again wounded—so badly that he never returned to his regiment at the front. When he heard the news it is a wonder that he did not turn on his bed and die. It was only the thought of the honor of his name and his fighting ability that pulled him through.

Lieutenant Colonel Couteau came to the hospital. He had served as a captain under Colonel Regniac, and was his warm friend. He had been detached for duty in the intelligence because he was an Alsatian and had twice been wounded and rendered unfit for duty.

"I come on an official mission, *mon colonel,*" Couteau told the man in the bed.

"Yes?" inquired the elder Regniac.

Couteau reached out and grasped the hand of his old friend, as if to steady him for a great shock, and his eyes were dim. Regniac knew that some blow was to strike him and steeled himself. It was probably news that his boy had been killed at the front.

"I have been chosen because I am your old friend," Couteau said in a husky voice. "You must understand that I feel with you."

"I am a soldier—speak!" said Colonel Regniac, lying there with a half dozen bullet wounds from a machine gun in his side and legs.

"It is of little Pierre," which was the name the boy was always known by.

"Dead?" the father questioned.

"No, *mon colonel;* I but wish he were," Couteau burst out. "He is under arrest!"

Colonel Regniac had stiffened under the blankets. He saw, after the first shock, that Couteau was greatly excited.

"Tell me!" he demanded.

"I cannot say much, my old friend," he answered after a little, and there were tears in his eyes now. "You know what we of the Second Bureau occupy ourselves with in time of war. Don't you understand that I cannot say *the word* to you who have been as close as a brother!"

Colonel Regniac was pulling himself up in bed, unmindful that he had opened afresh one of the wounds, and staring at his friend.

"Espionage? Spying?"

IT was a demand, and his finger nails were biting into the hand that Couteau was holding. The other nodded his head as if it gave him great pain.

Picture, if you can, this scene—the wounded colonel of the *Chasseurs Alpin,* with a glorious record as a soldier of France, and whose family for centuries had fought for their country, being told his only son was a spy!

Do you wonder that it was some little time before he seemed to realize that a Regniac who was an officer was under arrest for espionage? His own flesh and blood! His own son! And himself lying there with a half dozen bullets in his side from that same enemy!

For a long time neither of these old ones said more. Couteau feared, he said later, that the colonel might die from the shock, for he was already very weak from his grave wounds. At last the man in the bed spoke, and this time his voice was crisp but low.

"Tell me, my old friend," he said.

"The essence of this situation, my ancient friend, is that Pierre met a lady who has long been in the employ of the *Wilhelmstrasser* and told her things he should not—showed her certain military papers," Couteau told his former commander. "You see, he is an aid-de-camp at the war ministry and——"

He caught himself and turned his head.

"And his name was De Regniac?" suggested the man in the bed.

Couteau nodded, and hastily went on.

"He had access to certain information," he said. "We had the woman under observation. She moved in high circles—senators and under-ministers were her friends—so we had to use great tact. At last we had what we wanted, but unfortunately it was found that what was intercepted was information she had secured from Pierre.

"This woman was dangerous to France, you must understand. We had been watching her since long before 1914. It had taken a long time, but now we had the evidence. We *had* to arrest her—and Pierre."

He stopped now and gazed at the wall of the room, and kept his eyes averted from the man in the bed, for he knew what was coming.

"My son died to make amends?" asked Regniac in a low voice.

"They brought Pierre to me, for I am like one of the family, as is well known," he said, and his voice was agitated. "We spoke long together, and I told him that you had been wounded again and might die. Then I kissed him on both cheeks for you, my old friend, withdrew my service pistol, sent home a cartridge into the chamber and laid it upon my desk, which is the custom, as you well know. Then I embraced him, for he is my Pierre as well as your own, and left the room."

"And you sent his body back to Provence?" the colonel asked at last, for the Regniacs are an old Provençal family.

"Pierre is not dead!" Couteau was forced to tell him at last, for the boy had refused to take that way out.

Before Colonel Regniac could say more, his friend hurried on.

"Instead, after a little, he came to the door and summoned me," he said. "He stood there very straight, and said that he would prefer to have the military machine take its just course and be arraigned before a council of war on the charge of spying. His mind was made up. There was nothing more to do. I, myself, made the charge, and upon me is all blame."

"The sentence was death?" asked the old one in the bed.

For the first time Couteau became more his natural self.

"Having made his admission, and the only defense that he was not aware that the woman was a spy, which was true, it was transportation for life!"

Colonel Regniac, lying there in that hospital bed, looked at his friend Couteau, and in Couteau's eyes he read the answer.

WHAT was it, you ask? Simple! Couteau, iron man that he is, could not bear to see the son of his best friend go before a firing squad. That is the worst death that could come to a Regniac. So, all he did was to fix things with the court-martial, that young Regniac be sentenced to life in the prisons of French Guiana—Devil's Island. A living death, perhaps, but still not the disgrace of death before a platoon of his own troops.

Regniac understood. For a long time he said nothing. At last he looked his

thanks to Couteau. He could not bring himself to speak the boy's name.

"And this woman?" he finally asked.

Couteau's lips drew into a hard line and his eyes snapped, for he is that type of officer.

"I, Couteau, gave the command to fire in the woods of Vincennes at daybreak this morning," he said harshly. "No mere captain saw her death. It was the least of my revenge for what she has done to your name and our boy."

Is young Regniac now in the penal colonies? Of a certainty he is not! Why, he never saw South America!

Why am I laughing? What occurred? Well, it really was a great joke when one comes to consider things now—especially for a legionnaire, who can understand most things in this life. Truly, it might have all been conceived in the legion, it was so droll.

They placed young Regniac in a fort near Paris, for it was in time of war, and boats were not running frequently to the penal colonies. One night the prisoner escaped. Pouf! Like that! Evaporated like water from under the lid of a camp kettle.

The soldiers guarding him, of course, were all boys, or men too old for the trenches. It was so simple that it was incredible, and if there had not been a war to be won there would have been much trouble. After the armistice all was forgotten save by a very few, and they were old men of high rank.

When Colonel Regniac was discharged from the hospital the War was over. He could have retired, but the only life he had was the army. He had not been told that the boy had escaped, but soon he found out. Those things are talked about in the army among those in the know.

The blow had been a terrible one. The first thing he did was ask that his name be changed on the army rolls to simply "Regniac." The "de" which marked him as one of the old nobility was dropped. Yes, his title under a king would have been the Count de Regniac. There is nothing regal about a family who has had one of its members convicted by court-martial of being a spy, you see.

They were re-forming the *Légion Etrangère* and he asked for assignment to us. We are the Legion of the Strangers officially, but unofficially I have heard us called many names—"The Legions of the Lost," and "The Legions Who Are Forgotten and Wish to Forget," for example.

Regniac knew this, and what better place could he come to? The men in the ranks would understand. The officers were bound to. Here, like a wounded lion, was a retreat where he could lick his wounds and where no one would ever so much as whisper about what had gone before.

France had been busy for four years at home and the legion did not get back to Morocco until 1919. In that time the Berbers had about decided again that they were really the kings of the earth or at least lords of the Atlas. There was work to be done and they set us about the job.

Colonel Regniac went south into the mountains with us.

The outpost at Oued el Tarka is far within our lines now, and goats and sheep nibble where many men fell. It is very peaceful and quiet, but in 1923 it was another story.

The outpost was commanded by a Polish lieutenant. He had been asking for more men, for he had but forty-five in Post Oued el Tarka, which was built on a steep bank over a dry river bed, and was a spear head into truly dissident country. This lieutenant, therefore, knew something was bound to occur.

A sergeant and ten men were cut off and killed, which reduced his command to thirty-five, and the telephone wires were severed. Not a nice situation, with

a thousand well-armed Berbers howling outside an outpost.

Let no one tell you that the Berbers of the High Atlas cannot fight. It is wine to them.

Most men out here curse the sun when it shines and the rain when it comes, but this officer got down on his knees and prayed for sun. With his telephone gone—we didn't have many field radios then—he had to depend on his heliograph. Without the sun he could send no messages. A cut wire doesn't mean very much. They are always being broken, and he knew that battalion headquarters back of him, unless they received some kind of message, might not know what had happened until too late. He sent out three different runners but they did not get through.

ON the third day came the sun, but there were less than a dozen left alive inside, and the fighting had been continuous. The lieutenant had seen that enough Berbers had been left behind to spell the end of the outpost at Oued el Tarka and that the others had pushed on north toward the other posts.

A message was sent and he was ordered to hold on. There was other fighting going on now which must be ended before any help could be sent to Oued el Tarka. It is simple to tell men dead on their feet to hang on.

Four more days went by, and then came the news from Colonel Regniac himself that he was pushing a column up and asking how many were left.

The message that lieutenant sent was simple. It read:

A sergeant and the post commander, both wounded!

Then came a whole series of messages. Regniac wanted to know if when darkness came the two might be able to blow up the post and get away. You see, his column was contesting every step they took.

Why did the Berbers want the post Oued el Tarka? We had ammunition enough there for a battalion and six months' supply of everything. If they could get inside once, while holding off the main body under Regniac, it would be worth all the trouble. Berbers think little of death, even among their own. It was the cartridges and the guns they wanted.

The two in the post—weary as they were—both still had their legs under them. It was planned, by the heliograph, mind you, that at a certain hour that night they would blow up the post and try to get away. If anything happened in the meantime they would blow up the post anyway, themselves sitting on top of the charge.

The lieutenant got the charge ready while the sergeant went from embrasure to embrasure and sniped at the Berbers, who waited below for nightfall. They knew that then they could rush and overpower what few lived inside. Berbers do not like day fighting as a rule. Dawn and dusk are their best times. Other rushes had been beaten off and now they played with those two like a cat with a mouse.

Night comes quickly out here, and the lieutenant set the fuse and lighted it and the two slipped out and started through the Berbers. They had only gone a hundred yards when they met a charging wave of the hillmen making for the outpost. It was then a case of bayonets. Both had armed themselves with rifles. How they lived through it no one knows, but they did.

The Berbers were not aware that they were gone, and when the natives reached the walls and got inside the post it seemed that all the others save a half dozen in this little fight scrambled up the hill to get in on the loot, which was what the officer had hoped for. You see, he had timed the explosion so that it would catch the outpost full of Berbers.

A Berber blade cut into the officer's right leg and opened an artery. It was two against a little group of hillmen, but the legionnaires won by the grace of the *bon Dieu.*

The explosion came. The walls of Oued el Tarka post burst their very sides and the Berbers inside were killed or put out of business. Two days later what the buzzards had left of two hundred bodies were found by the advancing legionnaires.

BOTH the sergeant and the lieutenant had been wounded before they left the post, and they had been constantly under fire for more than a week. In the fight within the Berbers lines the officer had been knifed so badly that he could not walk. The other had received numerous knife thrusts; one, it was found later, in his side, that was to prove fatal.

The lieutenant ordered this sergeant to leave him where he was and try to gain Regniac's column with the news that the order to blow up the fort had been carried out, and to save himself. The sergeant refused. Instead, he shouldered the officer, after binding up his leg, and started north.

"I am a legionnaire, and legionnaires do not leave their officers on the field of battle," was the sergeant's answer to the order. "If we are both killed, our colonel will find that his last order to the post at Oued el Tarka was obeyed, for the post is in ruins. It is the tradition!"

It was the tradition, mark you, for officers are *not* left to die by themselves.

The two knew in which direction Regniac was advancing, so the sergeant headed that way through the darkness in a country infested by Berbers. It is difficult country—red shale under foot, and steep *whadis* and hills. Every step you take up one of their sides you seem to slip back two. That was what those two wounded ones faced that night, one carrying the other, and both wounded.

A point from a *group mobile* that Regniac had thrust forward found them staggering through a *whadi* at daylight the next morning, and brought them back, while the *group mobile* continued its mission of harassing the flanks of the Berbers that were facing Regniac.

Regniac heard they were coming and ordered them brought to him, where a medical major waited. The officer arrived first, carried on a stretcher composed of men's overcoats tied to rifles, with the sergeant in a similar carrier bringing up the rear.

"I report that Post Oued el Tarka has been demolished as you instructed," the Polish lieutenant told the colonel who bent over him on the ground where he lay. "Of my command all are dead save a sergeant who brought me to the *group mobile* point on his back, in spite of wounds."

Old Colonel Regniac's eyes lighted. This was the heroism that you read about.

"I recommend the sergeant for the *Medaille Militaire* for his conduct which was true to traditions of the *Légion Etrangère* and of a soldier of France," finished the officer there on the ground, as the surgeon came along with a hypodermic needle to ease the pain.

"The name of this sergeant, so that I may at once approve?" asked Regniac.

For perhaps a half minute the officer did not make reply to his colonel, as if considering his words with care.

"On the rolls of my company he is 'Pierre Marc, sergeant, No. 67,987, a citizen of the Swiss Republic, and whose occupation is that of a musician,' " he said at last. "Will you, *mon colonel,* have this sergeant brought by my side and send away the others?"

He had waved his right arm toward the medical men and officers who had gathered around. The sergeant lay on the ground a dozen paces away, where some of the medical detachment were working over him.

Regniac gave the order and the sergeant was placed on a real stretcher then and set down beside the lieutenant. On the colonel's orders the others withdrew from around them.

The lieutenant reached out his hand and grasped that of the sergeant, who had saved him, and squeezed it tight, then he spoke.

"You see beside me, *mon colonel,* a true legionnaire and a soldier of France," he said very quietly and low. "It is this man whom I recommend for the highest award for valor that the Republic of France gives its heroes."

THE colonel had dropped to his knees, and now there were tears in his eyes as he gently took the sergeant's head in his arms. What they said to each other then was their affair and not that of the officer who lay there.

After a little while the old man turned to the other and spoke.

"You see, *mon lieutenant,* I could not in honor forward your recommendation to the ministry of war." His voice was broken. This dying man was his son, who had tried to retrieve the honor of his name.

"It can be done—anything is possible in the *Légion Etrangère,*" the lieutenant told him.

He said no more, but called a captain who had been a lieutenant in the same company in which he had been a *sous-officier* back in 1914. Another old legionnaire.

"Get out a field order, my ancient friend, and write what I dictate," he said to this captain. "It is the citation for the *Medaille Militaire,* for a sergeant known at the present on the rolls of the *Légion Etrangère* as 'Pierre Marc,' a Swiss. Note the date and time at the top now."

The captain did this and then rapidly wrote the long citation—one of the bravest ones in recent legion activities for a brave soldier. When it was finished the officer signed it and without a word handed it to Colonel Regniac.

Before the colonel could say a word the lieutenant was dictating again.

"This is also to be timed," he ordered. "It is to the officer of personnel. It is as follows:

"On this date the soldier known as Pierre Marc, a sergeant, whose serial number is 67,987, and who gave his nationality on enlistment as Swiss, and his occupation as that of musician, has asked that this be changed on the rolls of the *Légion Etrangère* to his true name.

"After the proper investigation, as required by regulations, I therefore state that I have now changed the above name on the rolls of this company to Pierre Regniac; place of his birth, France; occupation, soldier."

The captain finished writing and the officer on the ground signed it with a flourish. This he passed to Colonel Regniac.

"You have both these papers, made out in the proper manner, *mon colonel,*" he said quietly. "The first one goes to Paris. *Très bien!* The second to Sidi Bel Abbes. When the first is approved it is returned to Sidi Bel Abbes, and there it is found that the *Medaille Militaire* has really been awarded Pierre Regniac. Quite simple. You see, it is the way of the legion in such matters."

Before the old man could reply his son spoke. It was only his thanks to the officer, and he fell back—dead!

THEY gave Colonel Regniac his son's medal here on the parade at Bel Abbes, and he, in turn, had the medal and the citation placed in the *Salle d'Honneur.* On that day every regiment of the legion was paraded from Tonkin to the High Atlas.

Did the lieutenant know who the sergeant was all the time? He had known for some time before the Berber attack on Oued el Tarka, as had any number of other officers of the regiment.

What was the name of the officer at

Oued el Tarka? He is carried on the rolls of the *Légion Etrangère* under the name "D'Alegan."

Yes, that is the name by which you were introduced to me, my young friend. It is true, I am a Pole. "D'Alegan," you see, is my *nom du guerre*—my name in the Legion of the Strangers.

Here comes Colonel Regniac now and we must say no more.

STIFFLY the old lieutenant lowered his right leg from its chair rest. All the time that he had been talking a monocle had rested in his left eye, as it always did. Now he stood up, very straight, in his worn khaki-drill uniform with its row and a half of empty ribbon loops, and bowed to the old man.

"I will wait for you in the garden, *mon comte*," said Colonel Regniac with a bow to the two officers, and turned toward the door.

D'Alegan turned as the old man left the room and saw the wide eyes of the new lieutenant.

"He called you a count!" the boy exclaimed.

The older man's blue eyes twinkled behind the monocle and then he smiled broadly.

"Just a Polish count, my little one, and nobility is rather out of style these days," he laughed. "Plain First Lieutenant D'Alegan, engineer officer of the Fourth Regiment at Marrakech, Morocco, is much better."

He shook hands with the new man and said good night. Then he paused.

"You asked to whom Colonel Regniac talked at the table yonder," he said. "It was to Pierre!" His shoulders squared a little, and his heels clicked. "You see, in the *Légion Etrangère* a man may be dead, but his spirit lingers on. You comprehend?"

Quickly D'Alegan turned and went out the door.

The new lieutenant understood—at least a little.

In the September issue, out August 5th, Captain Leighton H. Blood launches temporarily into a new field, with a big, complete Washington murder-mystery novel. See page 192 for more about this sensational story.

A 125-MILE BEACON

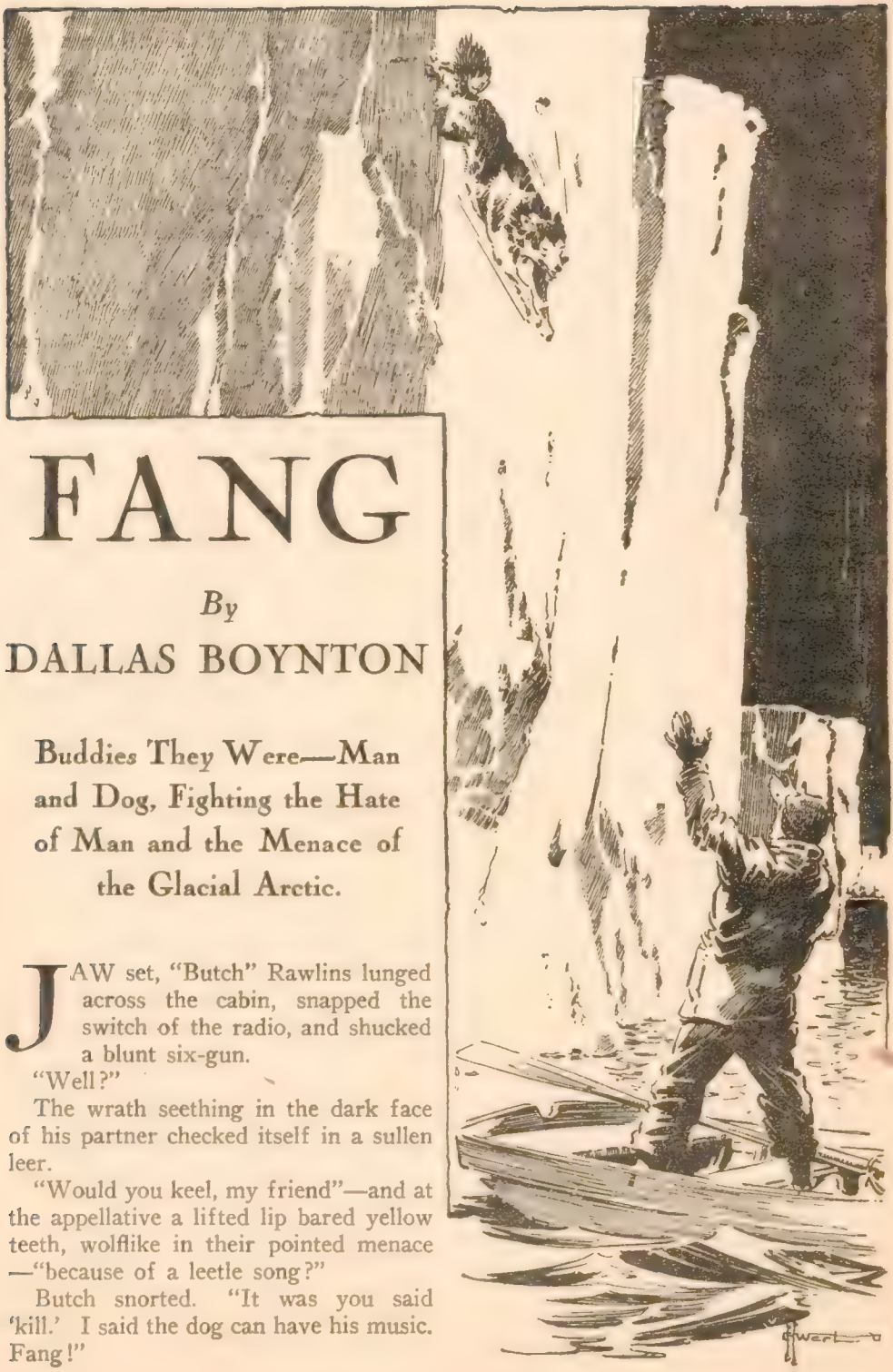
AIRMEN traveling from Toledo to Columbus, Ohio, are guided on clear nights by four powerful searchlights on a Columbus tower—great beacons visible for one hundred and twenty-five miles!

The bulbs used in these lights are not much bigger than those you use in your office or home. Our small bulbs are about one sixth the size of these developed by the Westinghouse Company.

A number of tests have been made with the new beams. At a distance of five miles, it is possible to read ordinary print in the strong glare. Aviators are able to gauge the position and height of thick clouds, even when high up, for the searchlights pick them out clearly.

Even on nights when there is poor visibility, because of fog or haze, the beams cut through to an unusual distance. A new feature of them is their narrowness, since they spread not more than a dozen feet per mile.

It must be a strange experience to be in a plane a mile above Toledo, the city and its lights and haze below, and night all around, and the dark, half-invisible world stretching in every direction, and to see, far away on the horizon, that eerie light and realize that it is one hundred and twenty-five miles away! Airmen must feel godlike in such moments.



FANG

By

DALLAS BOYNTON

Buddies They Were—Man and Dog, Fighting the Hate of Man and the Menace of the Glacial Arctic.

JAW set, "Butch" Rawlins lunged across the cabin, snapped the switch of the radio, and shucked a blunt six-gun.

"Well?"

The wrath seething in the dark face of his partner checked itself in a sullen leer.

"Would you keel, my friend"—and at the appellative a lifted lip bared yellow teeth, wolflike in their pointed menace—"because of a leetle song?"

Butch snorted. "It was you said 'kill.' I said the dog can have his music. Fang!"

But already the animal, a prime malemute, had sidled over to the mysterious loud-speaker, and, squatted on his sturdy haunches, was listening intently. As the melody barged forth, a stubby snout rose slowly roofward; a long, penetrating, vibrant howl welled from a heart dark with the fierce heritages of the implacable North.

The Canadian made for the door. "Hees museec he can have, chechahco! But does Moose Lafitte have to leesten? No. Hees company he find wit' men, not dogs!"

A mirthless smile dusted Rawlins's lips; it was usually this way with the Canuck when it came gun to gun. Grimly he holstered his iron.

"A dog keeps faith. Men don't."

Lafitte turned; the gaze of the two locked.

"Or women?"

Butch's eyes hardened. "Or women!"

Lafitte sucked in his breath with a quick, convulsive hiss and flung out the door into the teeth of a chinook gale.

Rawlins grunted. A senseless quarrel—music for a dog! But where hate rides wild, men have swapped lead for slighter cause!

From the cabin window Rawlins watched the fury of Lafitte's retreat down the rocky shore of the inlet. Murder was in the Frenchman's heart. Rawlins sensed it as he had felt unseen eyes watching from the black of the midnight bush.

Jealousy? The girl at Juneau, he reflected, was to himself less than the spindrift of snow off the white brow of St. Elias. That of the two she should prefer him, was quite understandable. Straight, big-boned, flush with the vigor of the late twenties and just long enough in the gold country to have the tenderfoot in him knocked off, he naturally had an appeal for the vixen-eyed daughter of the fur trader quite beyond the pockmarked Lafitte, scarred body and soul by a decade in the North. That, however, was something which could not be helped. And the girl meant nothing to him; that ought to be plain.

Nerves, then? A winter's wait while frost locked stream and tundra set up vicious tensions. Often something snapped. Greed? It might suit the Frenchman better to work the Tin Pan Creek claim alone and avoid sharing with a partner.

Butch's eyes narrowed as his gaze followed the angry strides of the figure slipping and sliding over the loose rocks. Lafitte would not strike openly. It would be a knife in the dark—the cunning of the fox, the stealth of the wolf. Thoughtfully Butch thumbed the butt of his six-gun.

AT the head of the inlet, a half mile away, sunset was casting its veil of pink and gold over the blue face of the glacier. Slowly the iridescence deepened until the great ice field glowed like a huge opal.

A steamer, signaling in the seaward passage below, sent the wail of its whistle up the narrow gorge in mounting echoes until earth and sky seemed fairly to quiver from the vibrant impact. The sound waves struck the sapphire brow of the slow-moving ice river; and a mountainous berg, hanging loose, came free and thundered into the green waters with a smother of foam to begin its journey oceanward.

At the spectacle, awesome in its majesty, Butch saw Lafitte pause and send back to the cabin a furtive glance. In another moment the Frenchman continued on; but now the fury of his pace was stayed, his head bowed reflectively.

Butch found himself wondering at this abrupt change in his partner's demeanor.

A growl from the dog drew him. The music had stopped; the malemute, bristling, had risen and was eying intently the loud-speaker from which issued a confused murmur.

"Fang! Down!"

Rawlins's command went ignored. The animal stiffened to spring; only the leap of Rawlins to snap the switch saved the instrument as the barking of a chorus of trained seals came over the air. At the sudden silence, Fang eyed the box uncertainly; then, crestfallen, looked up.

Butch stroked his head. "What's the matter, boy? Goin' to eat 'em alive?"

The dog wagged the plume of his tail and snuggled his nose into the palm of Rawlins's hand. When a man has spent a lone winter under the circle with his sole companion a dog, there is forged between the two a bond quite unlike anything else on earth. And this had been the lot of Rawlins and the malemute a season back. Shelter and food had they divided, share and share alike through the long, dark months in the white silence; unflinching, they had looked into the eyes of death; each knew that in the other's heart throbbed no drop of craven blood.

"C'mon, boy. Let's eat."

Fang, divining the meaning of the words, followed Butch to the corner where supplies were kept. There had been a special box of canned salmon for the malemute that Rawlins had ferried over from Juneau only a week before. A brief search sufficed to show that the box had been removed.

Butch's lips tightened. "Lafitte!"

It was the making of another row. But he was in no mood to let the thing pass.

EVENING was well spent when the Frenchman returned to the cabin. Rawlins, seated at the table by the stove, looked up pointedly.

"Where's that box o' goldfish I toted from Juneau?"

"Goldfeesh?" The big fellow's tone was lightly bantering. "Why you ask Moose Lafitte? He look like he eat box o' feesh?"

Butch kicked back his chair as he rose. "He looks like he'd eat lead in a minute! Where's that dog grub?"

Indifferently the Frenchman swung out of his mackinaw and hooked the garment on a nail. "That Black Point Siwash was by here yesterday. Maybe he take heem."

Butch stiffened. "Lafitte, you lie! Where's that dog chuck?"

An instant the black eyes of the Canuck shot flame; then, with an insolent hunch of his shoulders, he turned toward his bunk.

"An' if I lie, chechahco"—he flung himself prostrate—"what you go do about heem, *hein?*"

Rawlins could only grunt his exasperation.

The Frenchman, arms behind his head, grinned up evilly, a surly, provocative light in his slitted eyes. "Maybe you t'ink Moose Lafitte pull gun so you can poke lead into him like you say. But Moose no damn fool. He don't pull gun. So what you do, *hein?*"

Crimson dyed Butch's face. You couldn't shoot a man in cold blood who wouldn't draw! He puffed hotly. "Get up an' fight then!"

More than once had they flailed each other with fists nigh to exhaustion, and could again.

But now the yellow teeth of the Canuck broke through tauntingly. "No, I t'ink Moose he lay here."

"Skunk!"

Lafitte laughed. "How you say heem, chechahco!"

Rawlins exploded in a torrid ejaculation and stomped back to his seat at the table. It was some minutes before he could concentrate on the map of the Yukon he had been studying before the entrance of Lafitte. After a time he rose and went to a small tin box concealed behind a beam in a corner of the cabin and removed a paper, which, unfolded, disclosed a crude sketch of a claim site.

His brows gathered tightly as he compared map and drawing. The intensity of the frown stirred Lafitte's humor.

"Maybe you find gold you look hard enough, my friend. Tin Pan Creek she plenty pay dirt."

"You keep speakin' outa turn." Butch's voice had an edge. "An' Tin Pan Creek is what you'll never see."

"Maybe it is you, chechahco, who never see Tin Pan Creek."

Something made Rawlins turn his head. He caught in the black eyes fixed upon him a vitriolic glitter which was at once a warning and a threat. The lids closed.

Rawlins turned back to the bit of paper in his hand, the sole link in a bond of partnership that time and circumstance should normally have long ago dissolved.

But the glamorous world of the prospector knows a lure that is stronger than hate, or hunger or even life itself—the lure of gold. A veteran of the Yukon, whom once the two had befriended, dying in Juneau earlier in the winter, had bequeathed to the pair a claim where, he averred, he had secretly struck gold just as the season closed. The possibility that the old man had been mistaken regarding the importance of the find, occurred not to Rawlins or Lafitte. To gold hunters who snatch at straws, dreams of wealth are fashioned from substance far less tangible than a crude sketch of a veteran miner's discovery. The lure of the thing had filled their every waking moment all winter; it had made the long wait for spring a veritable torture.

Rawlins studied the drawing now, as almost daily he had from the first, locating the probable site on the big map, recreating in mind the pictures of river and tundra that he knew so well, measuring distances and weighing the advantages of different routes to be followed once the turn in the weather came.

As he finished his study, he folded the sketch and without thought made to slip it in the pocket of his shirt. Then, catching himself, he glanced toward the bunk of the Frenchman. The latter was slyly observing him.

"The leetle tin box in the corner, chechahco"—the voice of the Canuck issued thin and metallic—"you thought maybe that Moose would not see, eh?"

With a grunt Rawlins rose and replaced the map in the box where it was agreed between them it should be kept. And it was then the intuition came clear that Lafitte wanted sole possession of the sketch—that he intended to work the Tin Pan claim—alone!

BREAKFAST over next morning, Rawlins rose and slowly bundled his burly frame into a thick mackinaw. Lafitte sat back, smiling, and looked at him. "You go to Juneau, eh?" There was the trace of a jeer in the Frenchman's tone.

"The dog's got to eat!"

"By gar, chechahco! I t'ink you go t'rough hell for dat dog."

"Hell an' back. Hi, Fang!"

But the dog, instead of making his usual leap to follow at Rawlins's heels, lay glumly on the floor, looking up with lackluster eyes. Sensing something wrong, Rawlins dropped quickly to his knees. The dog's nose was dry and feverish. Never had he been that way in all their companionship.

The Canadian blew a cloud from his pipe. "I guess maybe Fang he don' like to go wit' you, long-leg. He stay wit' Moose Lafitte."

Rawlins, frowning, rose uncertainly. Leave the malemute to the doubtful care of Lafitte? He weighed the matter. If sick, the dog would need the more a bit of salmon to coax his appetite. Then, too, the schooner *Miquelon* would be in from Valdez, and he wanted to see Towbridge, the skipper, who had been in the stampede to Tin Pan Creek in the early days.

He made his decision. "Lafitte, hands off that dog! The world won't be big enough for us two, if I find a mark on him when I get back."

"You find him all right, chechahco," said Lafitte.

And it was the play of quick, calculating lights in the averted eyes that stirred in Butch a vague uneasiness; it was a sinister something in the tone that kept recurring in his thought as the motor boat chugged down the waters of the inlet on the way to Juneau. It was with a start which set his pulse leaping that his preoccupation was broken by the roar of the great glacier crunching resistlessly to sea and spitting after him a gigantic berg.

His conference with the old sea dog over the sketch of Tin Pan Creek, which he had surreptitiously pocketed unbeknown to Lafitte, was shorter than he had planned, owing to a veiled sense of impending danger and a persistent voice urging speedy return.

At the store he caught up a box of canned fish, tossed a bill on the counter with a curt order to the proprietor to credit him with change due, and made off hurriedly to the pier where he had tied the boat.

He stowed the box and began priming the engine.

From the pier a breathless voice hailed him: "Do you go already, chechahco, without stopping to say hello?"

He looked up. The daughter of the fur trader was gazing at him with the guilty air of a woman who knows that she is betraying her love for a man, and yet can't help herself.

He went on with his priming; his words were brief. "Just gettin' grub for the dog. He's got to eat."

The girl leaned closer. "Maybe he better be careful what he eat. An' you, too."

Rawlins glanced up again; he noted now the peculiarly distrait look in her eyes. "Yes?"

Her gravity deepened. "There are no rats on Sunrise Island."

"Rats?"

"That Moose Lafitte"—her voice quavered—"he was here to Devlin's, the trapper's, getting poison las' week. He said to kill rats. But there are no rats. So what for did he buy poison?"

A long look passed between the two; Rawlins felt the tempo of his heartbeat quickening.

"Be careful, gold hunter." He heard her voice as from a distance. "That Lafitte! He is one devil!"

A swift intuition seared Rawlins like a hot knife. He stooped to start the engine, caught himself as he thought of his incivility to the girl, and rubbed a confused hand across his brow.

"Thanks, Lys. See you later."

HE spun the wheel of the engine; the motor caught. Grasping the steering gear, he headed out across the bay with a scant wave of his hand for the wind-blown figure watching wistfully from the pier.

It was little enough gratitude; but his thoughts had play for only one theme. He knew now what had ailed Fang; he knew now the reason for the dog's lackluster eyes. Poison! All at once his long resentment toward Lafitte hardened into something grim, unyielding, implacable. A profound calm laid hold on him —the calm that comes upon men who go to walk with death.

He drove the throbbing motor to the limit, but it was mid-afternoon when he rounded the point that concealed the inlet and came in sight of the cabin. Mooring the craft, he pitched his freight into a dory, untied the painter and headed grimly for shore.

Suddenly across the billowing waters came a howl, low, vibrant, pain-racked. His oars paused in mid-air.

"Ya-hoo-oo-oo!"

He looked around. The cry was not from the direction of the cabin.

His quick glance swept the shore line. There was only the white spume of the water, the barren ledges, the scrub growth of evergreen. An indefinable apprehension was leaping in his pulse.

"Ya-hoo-oo-oo!"

The plaint seemed to rise from the head of the inlet where the big glacier brooded. An echo it must be, he thought, a sound wave striking the precipitous cliff of ice and rolling back across the waters. Yet, on a shelf near the sea level——

Butch stared at a black spot there. It was! A husky, seated on his haunches and filling the inlet with the sob of his despair.

But how had the animal reached that perilous ice ledge? There was no descent from the top save a hundred-foot plunge into the sea. From the water level the sheer precipice afforded no foothold for a climb. Yet the dog was there—and howling at the base of a treacherous ice field that had been known to slough a berg at the vibration of a man's voice!

A sudden chill gripped Butch's heart. Fang! It was Fang there on the ledge of the glacier—placed there by Lafitte to howl himself to his own destruction.

And then, as at the wave of a magician's wand, the picture came together. Lafitte had hidden the dog's food in order to force the trip to Juneau; had doped the animal so that he could not go, and once alone, had roped him and rowed him to the glacier, leaving him to fill the inlet with his howl so that a boatman returning with a cargo of canned fish would hear and go to the rescue at the risk of a mountain of ice on his head!

A devilish scheme—worthy of the cunning of the evil brain that had conceived it!

"Ya-hoo-oo-oo!"

Butch dipped his oars; the dory turned; white creamed the brine under the churning of his wild strokes.

HE seemed merely to be crawling; yet the dory, skirting the floating ice splinters which the glacier was continually casting off, made good time. It was when he had reached the halfway mark some four hundred yards from the ice mass that the malecute sensed his approach.

Turning his head, Rawlins saw that the animal had risen on all fours and was gazing fixedly at the oncoming boat. Then issued a low whine of recognition.

"Hush, Fang!"

Butch's warning was voiced in a futile, senseless undertone. But he dared not raise it louder lest he loose a thundering cataract of ice. An ironic grimace twisted his face. The one life he loved most in the world—and he could not lift his voice above a whisper to save it! *There* was a refinement of torture from the black heart of Lafitte!

As he crept near the face of the glacier, a sinister hush seemed to fall—a hush broken only by the hiss of the seething tides crushing their white streamers against the ice. Stealthily he feathered his oars lest the creak of an oarlock give the final impulse to the release of a mountain of blue-white death. Never before had he been so close to the perilous ice river. Its chill, damp breath enveloped him. He shuddered despite himself.

Softly his voice rose above the simmer of the surf: "Easy, Fang, boy! Easy!"

The dog eyed the oncoming dory; the plume of his tail wagged hopefully.

With a silent prayer on his lips for the malemute to make no sound, Butch maneuvered the bow of the boat into a crevasse, and standing up, reached his arms toward the ledge where the dog stood trembling. It was ticklish business.

"Come, boy! Jump!"

His whisper rose to eager ears. An instant Fang hesitated; then, in a ges-

ture of utter faith in the waiting arms below, he launched into the air.

Butch caught him full on the chest; the dory lurched; the two went down in a heap.

Whang!

Before he could pick himself up there came the crackle of a rifle shot. From somewhere in the inlet had suddenly been born a thousand echoes; they were beating a wild tattoo against the glacier.

Whang! A second shot. Butch, rising upright from the bottom of the boat, was conscious of a vague shudder, of earth and sea and sky all slowly taking motion. Unaccountable the dory seemed to be sinking under him, sucked down by the pull of some mysterious undertow. He clutched wildly at the gunwales.

The great blue wall above him was slowly leaning; the sky began to vanish. There was the deafening thunder of splitting ice—the slow surge of water. Something swept the dory from under him; the brine gurgled in his ears as he sank.

Down—down—he could feel Fang's struggles in his arms. A lifetime he was sinking. His lungs burned; his eardrums were bursting—and still down—down.

WHEN he came to he was lying on a cake of ice looking up at a blue sky. He turned his head; his hand was clenched in a death grim in the long fur of Fang's neck. The dog, shivering, was peering down at him with curious eyes.

Had the malemute managed to break free from under the ice flow and drag the two of them on top of the floating cake? Or had the big berg split apart and buoyed them to the surface?

Wondering, Butch slowly released his grip and rose stiffly on his elbow. The wind had floated free the cake they were riding on, and was driving it around the seaward side of the island. He saw that it would shortly ground on a ledge. Getting to his feet, he called to the dog and prepared to wade ashore.

Numbed by the icy waters, the pair reached land and came up over the seaward side of the island to the cabin. The door was open; the place empty. Against the wall just inside leaned a repeating rifle; on the threshold lay two empty shells, eloquent souvenirs of two shots that had brought down a mountain of ice. Butch winced.

On the table, opened, was the tin box in which had been kept the sketch of Tin Pan Creek. Butch grasped the situation at a glance. Not finding the map, Lafitte had seen that it could be in only one other place—the pocket of the man he had supposedly sent to the bottom!

Irony was there! Butch allowed himself a grim smile. Then his stiff fingers sought his wallet and the withdrew unharmed the drawing he had taken to show the skipper of the *Miquelon*.

Outside the cabin he heard Fang's howl, long, penetrating, vibrant. Butch stepped to the door. He saw that the dog was gazing fixedly at the glacier.

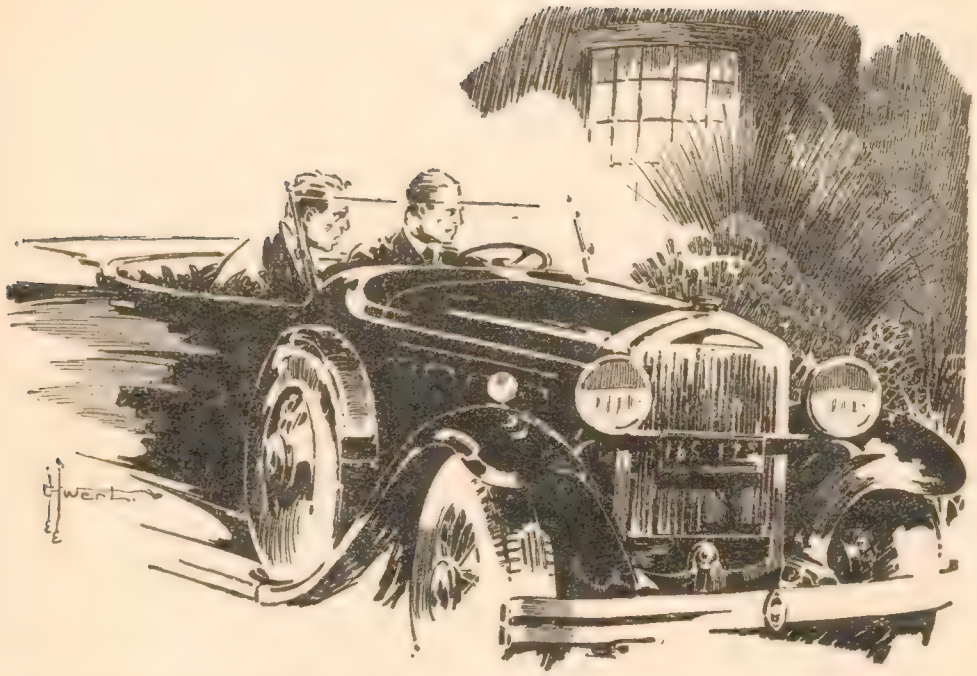
"Ya-hoo-oo-oo!"

Butch's eyes narrowed. He could make out a man in a boat rowing about at the foot of the ice precipice. Lafitte, looking for a floating body that harbored the secret of discovery on Tin Pan Creek?

A steamer, passing at the mouth of the inlet, loosed a blast from its whistle. A moment later Fang raised his long howl. Up in the ice mass something snapped. An avalanche of blue, iridescent with the pink and gold of sunset, toppled upon a man in a rowboat.

And when spring broke and the trek to the gold fields began, there were two only to go to Tin Pan Creek—Butch and Fang.

Look for more stories by Dallas Boynton in these pages.



RENDEZVOUS *at* NO NAME

CHAPTER I.

FIGURE IN THE DARK.

"SPIKE," said Wally Matthews in a severe manner, "as a law-abiding citizen I should call an officer and have you arrested. However, I'll have another glass of that beverage instead."

Grinning, "Spike" O'Donnell filled the glass from a magnum of champagne, and set the bottle back in a galvanized bucket of chipped ice.

"As a guy who knows real stuff, you ain't makin' no mistake," said Spike.

Wally Matthews's job of reporter on the Miami *Sun* led him into devious byways and varied contacts. He had summed it all up in the comment that if he starved to death on his meager salary he would leave a host of sorrowing friends. Spike O'Donnell was one of those friends.

Spike had seen the inside of one penitentiary and several jails. The less said about his past record the better. But Spike himself was a fine fellow; as fine as the vintage wines, champagnes and bonded whiskys that he dispensed to the wealthy who wintered in Miami. Spike didn't cut his whiskys with cheap alcohol; the seals and labels on his wines could be believed. And if the prices he charged were terrific, he gave value for them.

It was about nine in the evening. Wally, off duty, had dropped in on Spike for a few friendly words; and in honor of the visit Spike had uncorked a bottle of his best champagne.

By T. T. FLYNN

A Rapid, Tense, Exciting Mystery Novelette, Taking Place on the Colorful Coast of Florida.

Wally sipped the clear, sparkling liquid with appreciation, but gave a thought to the welfare of his friend as he did so.

"One of these days the government men are going to gather you in, old man. And I'll have the job of giving you a send-off in the paper."

Spike grinned. He was a short, quick-moving man in his thirties, with a pug nose and an infectious grin.

"Luck's been pretty good so far. I've got the best trade. My plane makes a trip every day to Bimini an' back. I've got a pile salted away. If they get me, it's the breaks—an' I'll take my medicine an' not squawk."

They were sitting in the living room of Spike's place of business—a modest stucco house on the shore of Biscayne Bay, where his amphibian could land and taxi up into the side yard without attracting too much attention. The telephone, on a stand in the corner, rang. Spike answered it, shrugged as he hung up.

"Old Man Belloc, over at Miami Beach, wants a couple of cases of Pol Roger. He's throwin' a big party an' most of the guests is lappin' up more'n he figured on. Jimmy's got the other car out makin' some deliveries, so I guess I'll have to take it myself. He's in a hurry."

"Belloc? Isn't that the jewelry man?" Wally asked idly.

Spike nodded. "Yeah. Lousy with coin. Owns a string of jewelry stores all over the East. He's one of my best customers. A big spender. An' how

that big red-faced boy loves the ladies. He's always got a bunch of dames hangin' around. Throws a couple of parties a week while he's down here."

"I know of him," said Wally.. "He's a space hog, always itching for a write-up in the paper. I'll run along with you if you don't mind, Spike. Nothing else to do this evening."

"If I get nabbed it won't be so hot for you."

"I'll risk it," Wally laughed.

Wally accompanied Spike to the big garage at the rear, watched him break out two cases of champagne from a cache beneath the floor, and load them in the rumble seat of a powerful roadster. A few minutes later they were bowling across the Venetian Way toward Miami Beach.

ANTHONY BELLOC'S winter home was one of the show places of Miami Beach, a large red-tile-and-stucco Italian villa, set in several acres of landscaped grounds that were bounded on one side by an artificial channel leading to Biscayne Bay. The front of the house was ablaze with light as Spike swung his big roadster through the gate.

The bright headlights of the car swept across palms and bushes—and Wally made out the figure of a woman dodging behind a clump of bushes out of sight. And it seemed to him that something flashed in her hand—*like a gun.*

"See that woman hiding from us?" he asked Spike.

"Naw. What's she want to hide for?"

"I'd like to know myself."

"Well, she's got a right to be exclusive if she wants to."

"But why so exclusive around here, with all that party going on in the house? It looked like she was carrying a gun."

"Search me," said Spike, bringing the roadster to a stop at the rear of the house. "Dames is funny. You never can tell what they got on their minds."

"I think I'll stroll back and see," Wally decided. "Wait here for me, Spike."

"Take your time," said Spike, climbing out. "There's a classy kid workin' in the back of the house here that I don't hate. I'll chin with her until you show up." And Spike chuckled.

Wally stepped on the soft mat of grass beside the driveway and blended into the shadows beyond the house. His calling as reporter had sharpened his bump of curiosity, made him alert to small, seemingly insignificant happenings. And this thing he had witnessed was full of possibilities. Why should a woman be wandering out here on the lawn alone, with a gun in her hand? Why should she hide so quickly?

Beyond the range of the house lights a deep and somber darkness existed. Wally's steps made no sound on the soft lawn; he was certain he could not be seen more than a few feet distant. He oriented himself by the gateway, dimly visible in the light from the street. And suddenly, silhouetted against that light, he saw a slender figure hastening across the driveway.

SLIPPING from clump to clump of shrubbery, she made her way around to the other side of the house. A wing jutted out there, surrounded by a low terrace, flanked by shrubbery. While the front part of the house was ablaze with lights, this wing was dark and there were deep shadows around it. But enough light was reflected there for Wally to see the woman reach the side of the terrace in a hurried little rush, stop, listen, look about, and then slip over the terrace to a pair of French doors.

She was visible for a moment against the doors, and then she vanished inside.

Wally was convinced he had not been

following a guest or a member of the household. Every action had been that of a prowler, an intruder. Miami was getting up in the world to be blessed with a feminine *Raffles*. What to do now? Notify the head of the house? It wasn't quite sporting, with a woman involved. He solved the matter by stepping softly across the terrace to the French doors. Curtains hung inside. Beyond them he made out a flashlight beam roving about the room.

It all promised a story. Women didn't go in for this sort of thing as a rule.

Raucous music throbbed at the front of the house. He could hear shrill screams of feminine laughter, loud voices. No wonder they needed more champagne. Wally wondered what they'd do if they knew the house was being burglarized. And even as he thought that, he softly opened the door and entered the dark room.

He realized the risk. Nerves strained and taut, the woman might react by shooting at him. The room was pitch black. He sensed her presence in the room, but his straining eyes and ears caught nothing.

And then he heard a soft rustle across the room to the left. A doorknob rattled. The door swung open. A light switch clicked. Wally blinked, made out a ponderous, red-faced man in dinner clothes who was surveying him with dropping jaw.

The two of them were the only ones in the room. *The woman had vanished.*

CHAPTER II.

GHOST ASSIGNMENT.

THE two men stared for several tense seconds. Wally was the first to recover from that initial astonishment. "Good evening," he said with a feeble grin.

"Who the devil are you?" the red-faced man demanded harshly.

"Just a visitor," said Wally airily, looking about the room. Where had the woman disappeared to?

There was another door at the side, heavy hangings at the windows. The room itself seemed to be a study or a home office. A bookcase stood against the right wall. A flat-topped desk was at one side with a telephone on it. Several chairs, a couple of filing cases, and a stenographer's desk were in the room.

The man in the doorway scowled at him. "A visitor? What kind of a visitor? You look like a thief! How did you get in here? What do you want?"

It was an awkward situation. Visions of headlines in his own paper flashed through Wally's mind:

REPORTER CHARGED WITH HOUSEBREAKING

A nice mess!

"Are you Mr. Belloc?" Wally questioned.

"Yes, I'm Belloc."

"I'm the reporter from the *Sun*."

"What reporter?"

"Sent out to write up your party. Big names make news, Mr. Belloc. I hope you have no objection to a little publicity?"

Anthony Belloc scowled at him doubtfully. "Reporter, eh? What's your name?"

"Matthews. Telephone the office if you care to. Here's a letter I received this morning." Wally produced a letter addressed to himself at the *Sun* office, thankful he had it along.

Belloc glanced at it, handed it back. His scowl began to smooth out, but there was still distrust in his manner.

Wally glanced at his wrist watch. It was nine twenty.

"I've got to call the office before nine thirty," he said. "I didn't want to disturb you at the front of the house, so I thought I'd slip in here and use the telephone. Sorry if it didn't meet with your approval, Mr. Belloc."

"How did you know where the telephone was?"

"Been in the house before," said Wally blandly. "As a matter of fact I came here with your bootlegger, Spike O'Donnell. He's waiting out back now."

Belloc thawed. "Yes, I know. I came to make out his check. If you came with O'Donnell I guess you're all right. Telephone your office, and then come in and join the party if you want to write it up. Sorry I was so abrupt. You gave me quite a start at first."

He sat down at the desk, opened a pad of checks, scrawled hastily with a pen.

"Don't apologize," Wally murmured. He stepped to the telephone, called Hank Summers, night editor, at the office.

"This is Wally," he told Hank. "I'm out at Belloc's place, covering that assignment on his party. The other matter was O. K. You can write it up as you planned."

Hank's amazed voice spluttered back over the wire:

"Write up what matter, you ass? Are you soused? No one assigned you to cover any party! Go on home and go to bed!"

"Yes, yes, I understand perfectly," said Wally solemnly, with an eye cocked on Anthony Belloc, who was blotting the check and tearing it out. "Mr. Belloc has asked me to stay. I'll get all the details."

"What details, you damn fool?" Hank demanded wrathfully at the other end. "You're either crazy drunk or out of your head! We don't want any details about any party! Get me?"

"What does your paper want, names and everything?" Belloc queried, getting up.

"All the dope they can get," Wally assured him.

"Join the party, you can have all the names you want. There may be a man or two you'd better leave out," Belloc winked, "but everything else is O. K. I'll give this to O'Donnell and tell him that you're staying."

"Fine!" Wally agreed. "Tell him he needn't wait if he doesn't want to. I'll go in as soon as I finish this call." And as Belloc moved toward the door, Wally said in the transmitter: "I stopped in to see that divorcee on my way out here, Hank. She says there's no truth in the rumor that she's going to marry Perry, the big oil man."

"What divorcee? What rumor?" Hank frothed over the wire. "Are you trying to kid me? Ring off and duck your head under a cold-water faucet!"

The door was closing, Belloc was going. Wally said gravely in a business-like tone of voice: "Read that clipping off to me. I've got plenty of time."

The receiver slammed at the other end of the line. Wally listened earnestly for some moments, until he heard Belloc's footsteps recede down the hall. And then he gently placed the receiver on the hook.

"Sweet suffering field mice!" he exclaimed under his breath. And then he perched on the corner of the desk and said coolly: "Come on out. Don't make me look for you."

SLOWLY the closed door he had noticed opened. A girl stepped into the room. Wally's eyes gazed with appreciation. A soft black coat was belted about her slim figure. A small felt hat framed her face. She was not a beauty, but she had a mouth made for laughter, a small, purposeful chin, shrewd brown eyes, cheeks firm with health and the joy of living. Right now those cheeks were a bit pale from strain, and there was a certain anxiety in her gaze as she contemplated him.

"Well?" said Wally.

A dimple appeared in her left cheek. The ghost of a smile curved her mouth. "Well," she repeated, "that was a rather weak story you gave him."

Wally had to grin a bit himself at thought of it. "I should have told him the rest of the story. What do you mean, breaking into the house? It's pretty raw business, young lady. Do you know what will happen when you get in court on this charge?"

"I won't go to court," she told him calmly. "You'd have told him I was here if you intended to do that. Are you really a reporter?"

"I am."

"And are you going to attend this party?"

"Yes."

"I wonder how generous you are."

"Not enough to fall for a line," said Wally sternly. "Get out of here and keep going, and thank your stars you missed a ride in the patrol wagon. You're too nice a kid to fall for this sort of thing."

"I'd like to attend the party with you," said the amazing young woman calmly.

Wally stared at her. "What's the idea?"

CHAPTER III.
THIS MAN IS DEAD!

THERE'S a man in there I want to meet," she confessed. "As a society reporter I could do it very well. I promise not to disgrace you."

"You have nerve anyway," Wally remarked. "What's your name?"

"Sonya Wainwright."

"Your real name?"

Gravely she produced a visiting card.

MISS SONYA WAINWRIGHT

Wally chuckled as he slipped the card in his pocket. "First time I ever heard of a housebreaker carrying a visiting card. How do I know you won't make off with somebody's pocketbook?"

"You don't," Sonya Wainwright admitted. "And I might. Are you afraid to risk it?"

"I spoke too soon," said Wally, leaving the desk. "I'm falling for your line after all. But behave yourself, young lady, or you'll roost in the calaboose before morning. I warn you I can be hard-boiled—even to a pretty face."

Sonya Wainwright laughed under her breath as they stepped out into the night. "I like you, Mr. Matthews. I think you'd make a nice housebreaker. If you ever lose your job we might go into partnership together."

"Now that you have designs on my honesty I'll watch you closer," Wally declared.

A tall, handsome young man in an obviously intoxicated condition answered Wally's ring at the front-door bell.

"C'min," he invited expansively. "Don' know who you are, but c'min anyway. Take off your coat, miss. I'm buttlin' while the butler op'ns bottles. The house is yours. What name, please?" He teetered on his toes and waited owlishly.

"Mr. Matthews and Miss Wainwright," said Wally, helping Sonya Wainwright out of her coat. He noted with approval that she looked well enough to go anywhere. Housebreaker she might be, but she was a thoroughbred also.

The tall young man led them into a great high-ceilinged room. In one corner a five-piece orchestra was playing. Some of the company were dancing. Others were sitting, standing, moving about. At least twenty people were in the big room, enjoying themselves haphazardly. It was a motley gathering, most of them young.

Belloc appeared as they entered. He saw them and hurried over.

"I forgot to mention that I brought Miss Wainwright," Wally said to him. "You've read her articles in the society news undoubtedly. Miss Wainwright, Mr. Belloc."

"I've enjoyed your articles many times, Miss Wainwright," Belloc stated gallantly, while his slightly bulging eyes surveyed her with approval. "Let me introduce you to some of the guests. Matthews, don't stand on formality. Drinks are coming in."

And Belloc led Sonya Wainwright away.

WALLY smiled slightly, recalling what Spike O'Donnell had said about Belloc's predilection for beautiful young women. He speared a wineglass from the silver tray that was being passed around, and found it to be some of the same vintage he and Spike O'Donnell had been drinking a short time before.

His glance roved casually around the room. A good many of the young people there had already had more than enough to drink. Several he knew. There was lean, dark, young Tony Cadwalader, the polo player, talking to Dot Tremaine, whose father was president of the Everglades Trust. And there was Danny Arnstein, who owned the Club Poinsettia, where those in the know could lose a tidy sum gambling if they so desired.

Presently Wally saw Sonya Wainwright dancing. Her partner was a sleek, black-haired young man with a small, close-clipped mustache and a suntanned face flushed with wine. Sonya Wainwright was laughing up at him, talking vivaciously, seemingly enjoying herself hugely.

Wally moved over to Belloc and asked casually:

"Who's the chap Miss Wainwright is dancing with?"

The swiftly passing shadow of a frown flitted across Belloc's face as he regarded Sonya Wainwright and her partner.

"His name is Smith," Belloc said, and turned away.

Wally wondered about that frown, wondered also who Smith was. He seemed to be the man Sonya Wainwright had wanted to meet.

Sonya Wainwright paid little attention to any one else but Smith. After they danced the two of them strolled over to an open window and stood talking. Wally saw the man offer his case of cigarettes to Sonya. She accepted one. He held a lighter to it, lighted one himself.

A manservant approached them with a tray of wineglasses. Sonya Wainwright took one with a laugh, and when the waiter had passed on the two of them clinked glasses and drank to each other. Another couple joined them. Introductions were made. Danny Arnstein, owner of the Poinsettia Club, strolled up and was introduced to Sonya Wainwright. He seemed to know the others.

A voice at Wally's shoulder said dryly: "Miss Wainwright seems to be quite a success. You look almost jealous of Smith." It was Belloc. His florid face was more flushed than ever.

Wally chuckled. "Wrong. We're only casual friends. I'm glad to see she's having a good time."

"That's what my parties are for," Belloc boasted expansively. "Every one's entitled to a good time, and if they don't have it they're to blame. Say, what's the matter?" He broke off, staring toward the window.

Confusion had seized the little group standing there. Arnstein and the other man were holding Smith up. And as Wally looked, Smith's knees buckled and he sank down to the floor. He sat there, leaning against Arnstein's legs.

Several people near by were looking at the scene curiously. The rest of the room had noticed nothing. Belloc hurried over and Wally followed him.

"What's the matter?" Belloc demanded of Arnstein.

"Don't know," Arnstein retorted anxiously. "He toppled over against me. Didn't say a word."

Sonya Wainwright and the young girl beside her had stepped back. Wally stooped and looked into Smith's face. And even as he looked the man's head lolled forward; the thin-stemmed wine glass slipped from the fingers of his right hand and rolled on the floor in a half circle. The burning cigarette in his left hand pressed against the varnish, scorching it.

"This man is dead!" Wally said tensely to Belloc.

CHAPTER IV.
THE CAPSULE OF DEATH.

"WHAT? Dead?" The color drained from Belloc's florid cheeks. "He can't be, man! He was all right a few moments ago!"

Arnstein eased Smith down on the floor. Arnstein was a short man, round and soft, with shrewd eyes and a loose-lipped mouth. He knew Wally, and spoke to him now, argumentatively, as if it would help.

"How can he be dead? He was laughing and talking just before he toppled into me. Nothing happened to kill him."

Wally felt for pulse and heart, took the wine glass and held its thin crystal rim beneath Smith's nose. No moisture collected on it.

"He's dead," Wally said firmly. "Get a doctor, but I don't think it will do any good."

By that time the scene was attracting general attention. Belloc's guests began to gather around the spot, craning, peering, asking what was the matter.

"I'd better call a doctor," Wally suggested to Belloc.

"Certainly. Do that. Use the telephone in my study. Bronson, show Mr. Matthews to my study."

Bronson proved to be the servant who brought the last tray of glasses in. He set the tray down on a table and guided Wally back through the house.

Wally summoned a doctor, and then called Dan Hardy, who was on the night desk at police headquarters, and identified himself. Briefly he told Dan Hardy what had happened, suggested that some one be sent over to get the doctor's verdict.

"Are you calling the police?" Bronson asked in a startled tone. He was a stolid, middle-aged man. The very suggestion of the police seemed to fill him with misgiving.

"I am," said Wally. "By the way, who filled the glasses on your tray?"

"I did, sir," Bronson replied uneasily.

"Where did you get the bottles?"

"They were delivered a short time ago, sir."

The music had stopped by the time Wally returned to the room. The ring of curious guests about the body had broken up; they were standing about solemnly. The spirit of hilarity and gayety had been quenched abruptly by the grim specter of death.

There was no change in Smith's condition. The color had drained from his cheeks.

Belloc mopped his forehead with a handkerchief. "I don't know what to think," he groaned.

"Don't think," Wally advised. "Nothing we can do until the doctor gets here."

That was not long. Bronson ushered in a thin, trim medical man who swiftly performed the tests of his calling.

"The man is dead," he said, getting to his feet and removing a stethoscope from his ears.

Sonya Wainwright asked quietly: "What did he die of?"

"From the way he collapsed I would say tentatively that it was heart failure. He is young for apoplexy. Anyway, the symptoms are not those of apoplexy."

Just then Bronson sidled up to Belloc. "The police are here, sir," he coughed.

Startled, Belloc rasped: "The police? What are they doing here?"

"The young gentleman called them, sir."

Belloc wheeled on Wally. "Did you call the police?"

"Smith didn't act like a man who had heart trouble before he died," said Wally coolly. "I knew you'd want the matter gone into fully, so I saved time by notifying headquarters at once."

Sonya Wainwright had cast a startled look toward him at mention of the police. Her face had paled. Was it guilt?

THE men from headquarters came in the room. Wally knew them both—Jim Martin, a short, red-headed little man, brainy and wise, who had solved several difficult cases in the past year or so; and Craven, a run-of-the-lot detective.

"There is no need for you men," Belloc greeted them with annoyance. "You shouldn't have been called in the first place. It was a mistake. The doctor says this man died from heart trouble."

"You misunderstood me," the doctor corrected him tartly. "A perfunctory examination leads me to believe that heart trouble may have been the cause of death. In view of the rather peculiar way he died I shall recommend an autopsy to the coroner."

Jim Martin nodded at Wally. "Hello! On the job, I see. Well, just what happened?"

Sonya Wainwright explained what had occurred.

"Pretty healthy young man to go out from heart trouble that way," Jim Martin commented, peering down at the body. "Any chance of poisoning, doctor? His eyes look funny. Notice how glassy and prominent they are?"

"I hadn't given much thought to poison," the doctor confessed. "After all, in these circumstances——"

"All circumstances are alike when you're not sure," Jim Martin said briskly. "I've seen some funny happenings."

Belloc broke in harshly: "You're not intimating that this man was murdered, are you?"

"Intimating nothing," Jim Martin shrugged. "Just curious, Mr. Belloc. Here's a dead man. No one knows how he died. If he was murdered, you want to know about it, don't you?"

"Why, certainly, but such an idea is ridiculous."

"Probably so," Jim Martin agreed. "Where's the glass he was drinking out of?"

Some one had set it on the window sill. Arnstein handed it to him. Jim Martin sniffed the inside.

"There was a whole trayful of glasses," Wally remarked. "I saw him reach out and take one at random."

"That probably lets the booze out then," Jim Martin said, putting the glass down on the window sill. "Still, I don't like the look of his eyes. Notice how the pupils are dilated, doctor?"

"They are," the doctor admitted.

"Some years ago, up North, I was connected with a case that had eyes just like that." Jim Martin dropped to his knees, bent closer to the dead man's mouth and sniffed. "See what you smell there, doctor," he urged. "There's so much perfume in the room I'm not sure I'm right."

The doctor followed suit. And his manner changed entirely as he straightened up. "Almonds!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," Jim Martin nodded. "Almonds. Hydrocyanic acid, doctor! Six-tenths of a grain of the anhydrous acid can cause instant death. I looked it all up on the other case."

"I believe you're right," the doctor agreed. "But how was it administered?"

Jim Martin shrugged. "Not in the glass. No almond smell there. He was

smoking, too, wasn't he? Where's the cigarette?"

Wally looked at Smith's left hand, where he had last seen the cigarette scorching the varnish on the floor. The mark was still there but the cigarette was gone.

Who had removed that cigarette?

Sonya Wainwright said distinctly: "I saw Mr. Belloc pick it up and put it in that flower vase there." She pointed to a blue-glazed pottery case on a stand beside the window, filled with cut flowers.

Belloc shot her an annoyed look. "It was burning the floor," he explained. "I put it in there to get it out of the way."

Jim Martin lifted the dripping flower stalks from the vase and peered inside. With his other hand he fished out the sodden end of a cigarette. He held it to his nose.

"Here we are!" he exclaimed with satisfaction. "This is what did it. His cigarette was doped."

The cigarette came to pieces in his palm under the tip of an exploring finger. Jim Martin lifted a tiny fragment from the sodden tobacco. Light gleamed against it. "Glass," he uttered grimly, studying it. "Some one made a capsule of wafer thin glass, filled it with hydrocyanic acid and planted it in the tobacco of his cigarette. When the red coal touched it the glass cracked, letting out the acid. He inhaled the fumes and died instantly."

CHAPTER V.
SPIKE'S OLD FRIEND.

DEAD silence greeted that statement. Belloc mopped his forehead, looked decidedly uncomfortable. "Astounding!" he muttered. "Who would want to kill the man?"

"Who is Smith?" Jim Martin queried.

Belloc shrugged. "As a matter of fact, I can't tell you anything about him. I met him on the beach the other day and we became rather friendly. I invited him here to-night."

"Where did he get the cigarette?" Jim Martin questioned.

"From his own case," Wally supplied. "I saw him offer Miss Wainwright a cigarette and take one himself."

Jim Martin searched for the case, found it, opened it. Four cigarettes were inside. Taking a penknife he slit each one open, probed in the tobacco.

"None of these are doped," he declared. "The one he got was all, evidently. Miss Wainwright, you had a narrow escape from death. If you had taken the next cigarette you would be on the floor now instead of him."

Sonya Wainwright shuddered. "It's ghastly to think of."

Jim Martin felt in his pocket, frowned, said to Belloc: "Let me have a cigarette, will you? I forgot to bring any."

"Certainly," said Belloc instantly. And he drew out a thin, gold-chased case and opened it. Jim Martin gravely selected one, lighted it with the gold-mounted lighter Belloc offered.

Wally noted that Belloc's brand was a well-known make of popular cigarettes, different from the cork-tipped Turkish cigarettes in Smith's case. He decided that Belloc's disposal of the cigarette in the flower vase had no significance. And yet he could not forget the unfriendly glance Belloc had cast at Smith a short time before.

And there was Sonya Wainwright. He had been studying her unobtrusively. She seemed disturbed, nervous. Did Smith's death touch her in some way?

Smith was evidently the man she had wanted badly to meet. Why had she wanted to meet him? Who was she anyway? A thief, by her actions, a thoroughbred by her appearance.

Wally's duty was plain before him.

He would take Jim Martin aside and tell him exactly what he knew about the girl. Murder had been done. No clew, no bit of information that would contribute toward the solution of it would be left hidden. What a story it would make! Sonya Wainwright was good newspaper material.

Their eyes met as those thoughts ran through his mind. Sonya Wainwright's glance was steady, questioning. Her face was pale. It was plain she was waiting for him to speak. And Wally smiled reassuringly at her, shook his head ever so slightly. Sonya's shoulders lifted as she drew a deep breath of relief.

Jim Martin shrugged. "This doesn't seem to have any connection with the house here. The man evidently brought the cigarettes with him. You people can give your names and addresses to Craven here and go if you want to. Leave the body here until the coroner looks at it."

Craven brought out notebook and pen, and Wally heard him ask Sonya Wainwright: "What's your full name, miss? Where do you live?"

She told him her name, and said: "I am living at the Southern Cross Hotel in Miami."

Wally remembered his paper and hurried into Belloc's study and called Hank Summers. He gave that astonished night editor a resumé of what had happened, adding that he'd stay with it and see what else he could find. He left Sonya Wainwright out of the matter entirely.

WHEN he returned to the big room the party was already breaking up. Those who had given their names and addresses were drifting out for their wraps. Outside automobiles were already departing.

Wally said to Jim Martin: "What are you going to do now?"

"Look this guy up. Got to know something about him before I can get any farther in the case. Nothing in his pockets that shows where he lives. Belloc doesn't know. It's funny."

Sonya Wainwright was waiting near the door. Wally joined her. "We may as well go. I want to talk to you."

She nodded silently. Not until they were outside did she speak. "You were a brick," she said warmly. "If you had told what you knew about me I'd probably be under arrest by now."

"I'm not sure but what you ought to be under arrest," Wally answered soberly. "Explain yourself."

She hesitated. "I don't know that there is anything to explain."

"Quite a lot," Wally assured her grimly. "Smith was the man you wanted to meet, wasn't he?"

"Yes," she admitted after a pause, in which it seemed she was going to deny it.

"You knew him then?"

"No. Not exactly. I think he was a crook, but I can't prove it. I do know one thing: Belloc lied when he said he had only met the man a few days ago. He had known him for some months, to my knowledge."

"What is your knowledge?"

"Nothing to speak of."

"Well, then, what did you enter Belloc's study for?"

"I thought you knew that," Sonya Wainwright said calmly. "What does any one break into a house for? Money, jewels, valuables."

"You're not a cheap sneak thief!" Wally snapped. "You can't make me believe it. You're covering up something. What is it?"

They were on the driveway now. Spike O'Donnell suddenly stepped up to them, grinning, a trace of excitement in his manner. "You're a fast worker," he said shamelessly to Wally. "Is this the dame you went lookin' for?"

"Yes," Wally admitted. "I thought you'd gone long ago, Spike."

"Naw. I was makin' hay at the back. An' I heard a guy had croaked in there, so I stuck around to see the excitement. Say, do they know who the guy is?"

"No. They're trying to find out now."

"Step over here a minute," Spike urged. "I've got something to tell you."

Wally excused himself, and went off a short distance with Spike.

"I sneaked up and looked through the window," Spike confessed. "I got a good look at that guy's face. I know him."

"Who is he?"

"Him an' I did time in the same pen about eight years ago. They called him Blue-white Shelby then. He was a young fellow, but he'd made his mark snitchin' sparklers already. He was doin' three to eight for a diamond job then. He got out about the same time I did."

"Sure you're not mistaken, Spike? Faces change, you know."

"Not me. I bumped Blue-white last week over on Biscayne Boulevard. I made him right away an' gave him the arm. He wasn't so pepped up to see me, but when he heard I was bootleggin' down here an' doin' good he thawed out a bit. Said he had quit the racket an' was a travelin' salesman, an' was down here on a vacation. He ended up by buyin' some booze from me. I delivered it."

"A diamond thief?" Wally repeated softly. "Where did he live, Spike?"

"He was stayin' at the Southern Cross Hotel. A suite of rooms there—1113 is the number."

"The Southern Cross Hotel?" Wally repeated, startled.

That was the address Sonya Wainwright had given. She had just stated she did not know Shelby, did not know where he was living. And yet they both lived at the same hotel! They had met at the same house!

How many lies had she told him? What was she up to? Was he a gullible fool after all?

"Some dame you picked up," Spike said admiringly, shooting a glance at Sonya Wainwright, who was waiting near by.

"'Some dame' is right," Wally agreed curtly. "Give us a ride back to Miami, Spike. And don't say anything in front of her about knowing Shelby."

"O. K.," Spike agreed. "An' if you ask me, I think there's something funny goin' on."

"Hysterical," Wally agreed. "And I'm going to find out what it is!"

CHAPTER VI.
UNEXPECTED INTRUDER.

THE Southern Cross Hotel was a twelve-story brick building fronting Biscayne Boulevard, where islands of shrubs and flowers separated asphalt lanes of traffic, and the tall, slender masts of the fishing fleet rocked above the docks just beyond the park opposite.

Spike O'Donnell parked at the curb, and Sonya Wainwright got out.

"What room do you have?" Wally questioned casually.

"No. 1115."

Wally suppressed an exclamation, kept a smile on his face with an effort. No. 1115—and "Blue-white" Shelby had been occupying No. 1113!

It was shockingly plain that Sonya Wainwright had been lying to him. Was she a confederate of Shelby's? Had she placed that poisoned cigarette in his silver case, smiling into his face while waiting for him to die? With an effort Wally kept a grim look off his face.

"I'll say good night then," he commented lightly. "And I'll probably see you to-morrow."

"Call me from the lobby at any time," Sonya Wainwright invited cordially. With a parting smile that lighted up her face, she walked into the hotel.

"Some baby!" Spike commented admiringly, following her with his eyes. "An' she's stayin' right next to Bluewhite's suite. Wonder if she's his moll?"

"I wish I knew," Wally said tensely. "She may be. I wonder how I can get up in Shelby's suite?"

"What for?"

"He may have something in his room that will make news when the story breaks—or help it break sooner."

"Better let the cops do it. If you're caught sneakin' in his room you're liable to get in trouble."

"If they do it I'll be out. This is my candy and I want it all."

"There's a fire escape outside one of his windows, but you can't get up from the bottom."

"Got a flashlight?" Wally asked suddenly.

"Yeah. In that pocket by you."

"How about a screw driver, too?"

"There's a dandy in the tool kit. What are you figurin' on doin'? Takin' the hotel apart?"

"Not quite," Wally grinned. "I've got an idea. Let's have that screw driver."

Spike got it, wiping off the handle carefully with his handkerchief before he surrendered it.

"No use havin' my finger prints on it," he remarked practically. "Not with my record."

"I'll return these to-morrow," Wally said, getting out.

"I'll wait for 'em," Spike grinned. "I'm getting interested in this racket."

WITH the screw driver and flashlight stowed in his coat, Wally strode into the lobby of the Southern Cross. He knew the night clerk, an efficient young man named Briggs; and he went to the desk now and casually inquired if any one had registered who was worth news.

Briggs gave him several names with Wally dutifully jotted down. From the desk he went to the elevator and rode it to the top floor. When it descended he climbed the flight of steps that admitted him to the roof.

A tangy salt breeze blew cool against his face up there. The city stretched on three sides like a vast blanket of jeweled light. At the south end of Bay Front Park, opposite the hotel, strings of colored lights gleamed softly from the peak of a band stand. Beyond that, waves in the harbor glittered restlessly. Eastward across Biscayne Bay, Miami Beach sprawled against the restless lash of the Atlantic surf.

To all of that Wally gave little notice. He was familiar with the arrangement of the Southern Cross rooms, and easily located the fire escape which ran past Shelby's suite. It was on the north side, over a narrow, dark alley. The iron ladder of the fire escape rose above the coping of the roof.

Wally climbed over to the serried flight of steel ladders leading down into the black pit of the alley. Quietly he descended to the eleventh floor, passing no lighted windows on the way. Crouching outside the darkened window at the eleventh floor, he found a copper screen.

The window inside was up at least a foot. Taking Spike O'Donnell's screw driver, he attacked the screen. Five minutes of patient work loosened it until he could get a finger under the edge. He pulled. The screen bent, gave with a crack.

Wally listened, heard no reaction to the sound, and gently lifted the screen out and set it on the fire escape.

He had masked his finger prints with his handkerchief. Now he gently slid the window up and stepped inside, pulling the shade down behind him.

The white beam of the flashlight slid over the walls and furniture. He was in the sitting room of the suite. There was a writing desk beside him. He turned to it first.

Blue-white Shelby had evidently done no writing there. Paper and envelopes, pen and ink, were neat and orderly as the maid had left them. A box of fifty cigarettes lay open on the table. Wally noted that they were the same brand of cork-tipped cigarettes that Shelby had carried in his cigarette case.

Pushing open a door which stood ajar, he found a bedroom. Shelby's things were all in here, and there were not many of them. Two bags, a huge kit bag of light pigskin, and a brief case stood in a row against the luggage rack.

Wally glanced into the bureau drawers, masking his finger tips with the handkerchief. Shirts, collars, ties, socks, and other articles of wearing apparel had been put in the drawers. He found two suits in a wardrobe.

In the tiled bathroom which opened off the bedroom, the flash picked out a few toilet articles on the glass shelves over the washbasin. The suits in the wardrobe had nothing in their pockets. That left the three bags and the brief case.

Wally tried the bags and brief case and found them locked. He remembered a bunch of keys Jim Martin had removed from the dead man's pockets, and wished for them now. While he was pondering what to do, a sound in the next room held him rigid, listening.

A key turned softly in the lock. He heard the door open and some one enter. Wally quickly stepped inside the closet and pulled the door to.

None too soon, either. Steps came into the bedroom. He heard the door close. The light clicked on.

Dismay struck Wally. Was he in the wrong suite? Was there going to be a ghastly scene wherein he played the part of thief, and the rightful occupant summoned the police?

He heard the window shade drawn down. Heavy steps came back across the floor. There seemed a trace of stealthy cunning about them.

The door was open a crack. Through it he could see the big pigskin kit bag at the end of the other luggage. A hulking form came into view, stooping over the luggage.

The man picked up the brief case, and half turned so that his face was visible. And Wally almost betrayed himself with an astonished exclamation!

The man was Anthony Belloc!

CHAPTER VII.
THE COUNTESS.

WALLY stood stupefied. Belloc here in the room of the man he had denied knowing! What did that mean? Belloc must have hurried away from his house; hurried here for some purpose.

Belloc placed the brief case on the floor—knelt before it.

Wally widened the crack a trifle, watching intently.

Belloc drew forth a penknife and slashed the leather around the lock, freeing the flap. He wore suède gloves, clear evidence that he wished to leave no traces behind. How had he obtained Shelby's key? What was he after in that case?

Belloc pulled out various papers, glanced at them, dropped them on the floor carelessly. His delving hand brought out a small morocco-covered notebook. Squatting there on his heels, he flipped page after page, scanning the contents.

So absorbed was Belloc, so intent was Wally in watching him, that both were caught entirely by surprise by what happened next.

The door behind Belloc snapped open. The voice of a woman lashed by concentrated fury demanded:

"What are you doing with Shelby's things?"

Belloc stumbled to his feet, holding the notebook behind him.

"Why—good Lord! You gave me a

start!" he stammered. "Why—why didn't you knock?"

"Knock?" The woman gave a short, hard laugh. "It's a good thing I didn't knock! You might have had time to cover up! What are you holding behind you?"

She stepped forward into the range of Wally's vision. At the sound of a woman's voice Wally had wondered if it wasn't Sonya Wainwright. But this vivid creature who faced Belloc tensely and angrily was vastly different from Sonya Wainwright.

She was beautiful, with the brittle hardness of a diamond—a woman who had seen thirty and fought it contemptuously aside with every aid of the modern beauty maker. Her brows were thin, her lashes long and dark, her cheek bones high, and her mouth hard.

A throbbing pulse in her white neck betokened her anger. And steady in one hand, deadly and motionless, was a small blue-steel automatic.

"Turn that gun away, countess!" Belloc begged through dry lips.

The woman curled her red-rouged lips in a scornful sneer.

"It wouldn't be much loss if it did go off! What are you holding behind your back?"

Belloc coughed, tried to bluster. "Don't talk to me that way!"

Her glance went to the slashed brief case on the floor.

"Double-crossing us, are you? I told Blue-white to watch for something like that! I thought your invitation to your house to-night was phony. Swell excuse, wasn't it? So you could slip over here and ransack his room? What did you get out of that brief case you cut open? Hurry up before this gun goes off!"

"You—you wouldn't dare."

The woman laughed shortly. "Dare? I'd be glad to. I never have liked you. You were a crook when you started and you always will be a crook. Even Danny Arnstein doesn't have any use for you, and that's going the limit. He's a rat if there ever was one."

"You liked Arnstein well enough to go to him for backing," Belloc reminded.

"When we couldn't get it from you. But he bled us through the nose for it. Blue-white told me he was just about fed up with you and Arnstein, too. What have you got behind you?"

Slowly Belloc's hand came from behind his back, showing the notebook.

She snatched it from his fingers.

"When Blue-white hears about this he'll have a few things to say to you!" she promised angrily.

"Blue-white won't hear about it," Belloc told her hoarsely. "He's dead."

The beautiful brittle creature laughed in Belloc's face.

"Blue-white dead? Why lie like that?"

"It's true," Belloc insisted. "He died at my house. Instant death. They found that some one had planted prussic acid or something in his cigarette. He inhaled the gas. It killed him instantly."

The countess's face paled, leaving two splotches of rouge on her high cheek bones.

"Blue-white was murdered?" she repeated uncertainly.

"Yes."

COLOR rushed back into her face. Her eyes blazed. The fingers about the morocco notebook clenched like the claws of an infuriated cat.

"You killed him!" she cried. "I might have known you'd try something like that! You invited him to your house to-night to knock him off! *I think I'm going to kill you for it!"*

A choked sob burst from her. But her gun covered Belloc steadily; she was dangerous and deadly now.

Belloc sensed his danger.

"My God, pull yourself together!" he

begged hoarsely. "I didn't kill Shelby! I don't know who did! I swear it!"

A hard, bitter laugh greeted that.

"*You* swear it! I wouldn't believe your dying oath. If you didn't kill Blue-white, what are you doing here in his room while he's lying dead in your house?"

"I knew when they found out who he was, they'd search his room," Belloc explained. "I didn't know what was in here that might incriminate me. I couldn't afford to have them find anything. I made an excuse to get over here as quick as I could."

"Yellow and crooked!" the countess sneered. "*Get out!* I'll tell Pat Flaherty and Nipper about it and see what they want to do!"

"Go through his things. Don't leave anything here for the police," Belloc begged as he moved quickly toward the door.

The countess shrugged. "Leave that to me."

She stood tautly until the outer door closed; and then with a sigh she lowered the gun and turned to the brief case.

For a moment her back was to Wally. He shoved the door open, reached her in one swift step and grabbed the gun from her hand.

CHAPTER VIII.
BIG-TIME STUFF.

A STIFLED cry burst from the countess's lips. She whirled to face him. "Don't take it so hard," Wally smiled grimly, slipping the gun in his pocket.

Once more the countess looked like an infuriated cat.

"Who are you?" she gasped through tight lips.

"I'm the Count of No-account, my dear countess," Wally chuckled. "I'll trouble you for that notebook, please."

She backed away a step, her blazing eyes swinging from him to the open cupboard door. "You were in there?"

"Right behind the door," Wally assured her.

"You heard?"

"Every word."

She backed away another step. Wally followed. "Don't make me take it away from you," he begged.

The countess stooped suddenly. Her hand slipped under the hem of her dress to her leg. She straightened with a thin, vicious stiletto in her fingers.

Like the lash of a beautiful, deadly snake she was at him.

Wally stumbled over the brief case as he threw up an arm and dodged. His lurch to the side saved his life. A razor-sharp point of the stiletto ripped through his coat sleeve, slashed deep into the muscles of his forearm.

A second furious stab slithered through his coat and along a rib before he could grab her arm. He didn't want to use the gun on her.

She fought tigerishly, clawing for his face and eyes, trying to wrench the stiletto away.

Realizing that he was fighting for his life, Wally abandoned all attempts at gallantry. A wrench on her wrist brought a stifled cry of pain. The stiletto clattered to the floor. Wally whirled her around, pinioned her elbows behind her.

"You devil!" he panted.

He snatched up the stiletto, slipped it into his pocket and sat her down forcibly on the edge of the bed.

"Now stay there!" he ordered sternly.

The countess seemed to realize that further struggle was useless. Glaring, breathing hard, she sat there on the edge of the bed, watching him.

Wally had taken the notebook from her hand also. He flipped the pages, saw writing, figures, and put the notebook in his pocket.

"Since this seems to be what Belloc wanted, I'll take it along," he informed her.

"You know Belloc?"

Wally saw his error and shrugged. "I heard you call him by name."

"If it's money you want, I'll buy that from you," she offered suddenly. "If it's only——"

"But it isn't money I want," Wally grinned.

"What is it, then? What are you doing in here?"

"Looking around," Wally chuckled. "Trying to satisfy a large bump of curiosity. Now sit there until I get out, and be thankful I don't call the police and place a charge against you."

Wally backed to the door, closed it behind him, stepped over to the window. And as he reached it the door opened!

WALLY swung around, slipping his hand to the gun in his pocket. A squat, powerfully built man entered the room, swung the door to behind him and then stopped short in amazement at sight of Wally standing at the window, gun in hand.

The stranger was dressed in a perfect-fitting gray suit, with the soft brim of a panama hat turned down over his eyes. His heavy, fleshy face was coarse and brutal.

"What the hell?" he growled in a rasping voice.

"And who might you be?" Wally asked.

Just then the bedroom door was jerked open. The countess cast one look at them and stepped into the room.

"Who is this guy?" the stranger threw at her, nodding toward Wally.

"I don't know," the countess answered swiftly. "Stop him, Matt! Blue-white is dead! And he has got Blue-white's notebook! You know what it means if it gets away."

Matt glowered at Wally.

"Stop him? While he's holdin' that rod on me?" he snorted. "Do I look like a fool?"

"It's not loaded, Matt. I never carry cartridges in it until I know I'll need them."

Wally stared foolishly at the useless gun. Not loaded? He pointed the muzzle at the floor, pulled the trigger. A dull click followed. He backed to the window warily.

Matt's wide, thick lips twisted in a snarl. His flat nostrils widened. His eyes narrowed, his hands clenched into thick fists. With astonishing nimbleness he advanced on the balls of his feet.

"Don't try it!" Wally warned sharply. "I'll——"

The rest of his words died unuttered as Matt rushed him. Wally met the rush with a lunge, snapping the useless automatic into the coarse face.

It struck the flat nose, crushed the bridge. And as Matt wavered Wally smashed him in the jaw with a right cross that carried every ounce of his weight behind it.

Matt tottered back on his heels, groping for Wally with his long, powerful arms.

Wally dodged, snapped in a jarring jab that knocked the man sprawling on the floor. The countess rushed in to help. Wally swept her aside with an arm, rolled out the window onto the fire escape and raced down.

Two stories below he looked up and saw the man coming out after him. A fight on the narrow, flimsy fire escape high above the paved alley would probably mean death to one of them. Certainly it would attract attention. Wally descended rapidly. He climbed out on the bottom ladder until his weight overbalanced the counterweight and it swung creakingly down. He stepped off onto the asphalt and it swung up again. Wally ran through the darkness to the lighted mouth of the alley.

Good old Spike O'Donnell was still waiting at the curb for him. Spike looked up in startled surprise as Wally jerked the car door open and leaped in.

"Get away from here!" Wally snapped. *"Quick!"*

Spike asked no questions. His foot stamped the starter. His hand turned the ignition key. The motor purred, the car jerked away from the curb.

Looking back, Wally caught sight of Matt pausing at the mouth of the alley. Then they swung around the next corner and left it all behind.

Wally examined his ripped coat sleeve. The shirt underneath was sodden with blood.

Spike O'Donnell took one look at that and whistled softly.

"Have a nice time?" he asked mildly.

Wally grinned as he looked in at his side. Fortunately both the wounds were clean slashes, not dangerous.

"They play rough in this game," he said. "How about running out to your house and getting patched up?"

"Have you there in five minutes," Spike assured him. "And then what?"

"Plenty!" Wally promised him. "This is big-time stuff, Spike!"

CHAPTER IX.
THE CLUB POINSETTIA.

IT was getting late—but not for the Club Poinsettia. Spike O'Donnell parked his long roadster beside two-score other machines and said: "Guess I'll go in with you."

"Better not," Wally suggested as he got out. "Might be a good thing later on if you weren't connected with me."

"The boy does think," Spike chuckled approvingly. "O. K., I'll prowl around and see if there are any dames on the loose."

The Club Poinsettia was located at the southern end of Miami Beach. In front the white rollers of the trackless Atlantic swept in on a smooth sand beach, and behind was a large grove of palms where automobiles parked.

The long, low, frame building had a huge veranda across the front, as wide as the building itself. On that veranda were chairs, tables, and space to dance. Inside were rooms where one might dine, dance, or gamble, publicly or privately.

An orchestra in front was playing as Wally entered the building. The veranda was crowded. Inside, in the big main gambling room, walled with panels of onyx and silver, roulette balls clicked rhythmically. The gambling tables were crowded. Waiters were hurrying to and fro.

And Danny Arnstein was standing near the door, hands thrust in the pockets of his dinner coat, his round, soft, white face calm and smiling, as if it had been an age since he had stood beside a friend who had died violently.

Arnstein saw Wally enter. His shrewd eyes narrowed for a brief instant, and then he hurried over and offered his hand.

"Want to hit the high spots for a little forgetting?" he asked smilingly, showing that his mind was not free from thoughts of the recent incident.

The hand felt cold and flabby. Wondering why he had never noticed that before, Wally released it.

"Can't forget such things in my line," he answered. "I've been wondering a lot. Got any idea what lies behind it?"

Arnstein shrugged.

"Haven't given it a thought. Did they find out who Smith was?"

"I called in a few minutes ago. They didn't know any more than Belloc was able to tell them. Did it strike you as queer that he'd invite a stranger in that way?"

"Not when you know Belloc," Arnstein replied easily. "He met the fellow, liked him and asked him to come around. I'll bet Belloc doesn't know half the people at his parties. All he wants is a crowd and a hot time."

"Good friend of yours?"

Arnstein shrugged again. "So-so. He comes here quite a bit. Asked me

to drop around to-night if I wanted to. Care for a drink?"

"Don't mind."

"Come in the office."

Wally checked over the maze of facts as he followed Arnstein. Belloc knew Blue-white Shelby—Arnstein knew Shelby and Belloc—Sonya Wainwright didn't seem to know any of them. And yet she was living next door to Shelby!

The whole affair was a network of mystery and lies. Every one connected with it seemed to be lying. Under a surface of innocence, violent matters were taking place. Murder had been done—and it was merely a prelude to something else!

What had Danny Arnstein to do with it?

IN his small office, paneled in onyx and silver, furnished with modernistic chairs and desk, Danny Arnstein opened a carved cabinet and raised an eyebrow.

"Scotch, rye, cognac—how'll you have it? All good stuff."

"Cognac, straight."

Wally tossed off the drink, and sipped the chaser of mineral water Danny Arnstein handed him.

And without warning the door burst open!

Belloc charged into the room—recoiled at sight of Wally.

"Good evening," Wally said evenly, putting his glass down gently.

Belloc looked distraught. His eyes were bulging more than ever, his beefy, red face was flushed, he gnawed at a corner of his lip as he stared at Wally.

Danny Arnstein moved to close the door Belloc had forgotten.

"What's on your mind?" he inquired, and a trace of sharpness entered his voice.

Belloc pointed at Wally. His fingers were unsteady.

"Who *is* this fellow?" he demanded hoarsely.

Danny Arnstein moved away from the door. "I thought you knew him. It's Mr. Matthews, a reporter on the *Sun*. Why?"

Wally smiled thinly as he reached for a cigarette.

"I introduced myself to Mr. Belloc when I was at his house," he said quietly.

"How—how long has he been here?" Belloc gulped.

"Five minutes—perhaps ten," Danny Arnstein answered.

Belloc took a step forward, caught Wally's arm with a quick gesture and lifted it, looking at the coat sleeve underneath.

"I thought so!" he said. "Don't let him get out of here, Arnstein!"

Wally jerked his arm away sharply.

"What do you mean?" he snapped—but even as he asked it he knew. The net of mystery and lies had enmeshed him.

Danny Arnstein was just as surprised. "What's the idea?" he questioned with wrinkling brow. "Are you going nutty?"

"I know what I'm talking about!" Belloc mumbled wildly. "Haven't you heard? Didn't the countess call you?"

"No!" said Danny Arnstein sharply. "I don't know anything. Spill it!"

BELLOC moistened his lips. "I went to search Blue-white's room before some one else did. I found his record book. The countess came in and made me give it to her. After I left a man jumped out of the closet where he had been hiding and took it away from her. He had heard everything we said—and he got away with the notebook. The countess slashed him in the arm before he got away. Her description fitted Matthews here. I came to talk it over with you. Look at his arm! It's been cut! He's the man! Don't let him get away from here!"

Belloc's voice rose to the verge of

hysteria as he broke off and mopped his face.

Danny Arnstein's face went bleak and sharp. The soft, roundish look vanished, leaving him shrewd—and cruel.

"What about it, Matthews?" he demanded coldly.

Wally raised his coat sleeve, looked at the slit there, mended crudely and hastily at Spike's house.

"My sleeve *is* ripped," he admitted.

"Then you're the guy Belloc is talking about?"

"Where did all this happen?" Wally asked Belloc with interest.

"*You* know! At the Southern Cross Hotel!"

"And what were you doing there?"

"I—I—what business is it of yours?" Belloc glared at him. "What were *you* doing in that room? What are you up to?"

"Matthews was just curious, weren't you?" Danny Arnstein queried softly; but there was no softness in his face.

"Just curious," Wally agreed.

"You probably didn't realize that you were meddling in something that wasn't healthy," Danny Arnstein went on in the same soft voice.

"For whom?"

"You, of course."

"I wonder," Wally suggested, "if it's really me that it's unhealthy for."

"I wouldn't," said Danny Arnstein, walking around behind his desk and opening a drawer.

He took out an automatic, slipped off the safety catch.

"Now just hand that notebook over to Belloc," he ordered; and his eyes were cold, his voice flat and toneless as he came out from behind the desk with the gun.

Wally grinned coldly.

"You won't shoot, Arnstein. Twenty people would hear it and investigate. Besides, I didn't come here alone. The police are interested in this, you know."

"But you're not working with the cops," Arnstein stated confidently. "I know your way. You'll go it alone until you get all the story for your paper. If the cops were in it they'd have nabbed the countess right away."

Danny Arnstein came closer as he spoke. His eyes had narrowed to gleaming points. It was plain that he was keeping self-control with an effort. And Belloc was perspiring profusely as he watched.

"Don't kill him!" he gulped. "I—I don't want to be connected with anything like that!"

"You're connected already," Danny Arnstein told him out of the corner of his mouth. And with a gesture as swift as it was deadly he struck with the barrel of the gun.

Wally's upthrown arm failed to block it. He caught one glimpse of Danny Arnstein's contorted face—and then the room spun into haze. He felt himself falling——

CHAPTER X.

THREE MINUTES TO LIVE.

BELLOC'S red face was pasty as he stared down at the crumpled form at their feet. "You—you *killed* him!" he babbled thickly.

Danny Arnstein pocketed the gun, stooped, ran his fingers over the gash on Wally's temple.

"He's a long way from dead," he grunted. "Get a grip on yourself, you fool!"

As he spoke, Danny Arnstein searched Wally's pockets. There was no knife or gun in them; and when Arnstein straightened there was a baffled scowl on his face.

"No notebook!" he said roughly. "I wonder if you made a mistake! It would be just like him to stall us along to see what he could find out."

"There can't be any mistake," insisted Belloc nervously. "His coat sleeve is cut where he was stabbed. Look at his arm."

Danny Arnstein found the bandaged wound. "Right. He left the notebook somewhere before he came here."

"Per-perhaps he gave it to the police," Belloc stammered. He was completely unnerved. Glistening beads of sweat continued to start out on his face.

Danny Arnstein scowled down at Wally, finally shook his head.

"I don't think so. The cops would have come here themselves. He's playing it alone. Go home and lay low. I'll attend to this."

"What are you going to do?" Belloc queried apprehensively.

"Never mind!" Danny Arnstein snapped at him. "Get out. This ain't business for you. You're yellow. Beat it!"

"What am I to do?"

"Nothing! Keep your mouth shut!"

And Belloc went meekly, mopping at his reddish face.

Danny Arnstein closed the door behind him, locked it—and thereupon became an exceedingly busy man. He went to his modernistic desk, reaching the floor on three sides. Several papers on the top he slipped into a drawer, and then with a heave he tilted the desk. A section of the floor beneath came up also, revealing a flight of steps leading down.

Arnstein caught Wally under the shoulders, dragged him to the opening and down the steps, feet and legs trailing. A few moments later he came up, pushed the desk back in place, picked up a French-type telephone that rested on a stand beside it and called a number.

"This is Danny Arnstein," he identified himself. "Where's the countess? . . . Out? O. K. When she comes in tell her I've got that guy who grabbed Blue-white's notebook. . . . Yeh, he's out cold right now. The notebook ain't on him. You birds go ahead. Belloc will stay home and keep his mouth shut. . . . O. K."

He hung up.

A few moments later Danny Arnstein was making a leisurely tour of the club, bowing, smiling, bland and affable as usual.

SPIKE O'DONNELL found no lonely young lady seeking company out under the palms. Half an hour of waiting found him restless. Seductive strains of music throbbed enticingly from the clubhouse. Spike finally strolled around in front, ready to meet Wally with a blank face, if he encountered him.

Wally was not on the veranda. Spike walked inside, watched a roulette table briefly, moved unobtrusively about.

He passed through a doorway and almost bumped into Danny Arnstein. They knew each other slightly.

"Hello," said Arnstein affably. "Anything I can do for you?"

"Nope," Spike denied. "Just killin' a little time." And when Danny had passed on, Spike drifted after him. Danny Arnstein presently entered his office. Spike lighted a cigarette thoughtfully. Wally had come to see Arnstein. Queer he had disappeared. Spike went to Arnstein's office door and turned the knob. The door was locked.

An attendant standing near by said hurriedly: "Mr. Arnstein is busy. He can't be disturbed now."

"O. K.," Spike assented, and went outside.

Spike walked around to the back corner and looked thoughtfully at the lighted windows of Arnstein's office. Then he searched until he found an empty soft-drink case. He carried that under the window and stepped on it. The curtain inside was drawn, but there was a quarter of an inch of space at the bottom.

Through that he could see that Arnstein's office was empty.

The telephone beside the desk rang sharply. Spike's eyes bulged a moment

later as he saw the desk tilt back and Arnstein emerge from the opening in the floor. Arnstein answered the telephone, spoke briefly for a few moments, and then went down below once more, pulling the desk down after him.

Spike jumped off the box and hurried to his automobile.

WALLY'S eyes blinked as they opened and met light. It was some moments before he shook off the lethargy that gripped him. His mouth was aching from a wadded cloth gag held in by a strip about his face. He tried to move, but found that he was tied hand, foot, and chest in a chair.

A shaded light bulb in the ceiling showed oatmeal-papered walls, a waxed wooden floor covered with an expensive rug, several comfortable chairs, a velours-covered divan and a table on which were several magazines, an ash tray, cigarettes and matches.

A flight of steps went up in one corner of the room. From overhead came muted music, voices, the soft scrape and pat of steps.

While those facts registered, the music suddenly sounded louder. Wally looked up and saw a section of the ceiling at the top of the steps swing up. Arnstein backed down, the ceiling lowered again after him, and he descended the steps.

"So you came out of it?" Arnstein grunted when he saw Wally's eyes on him. He walked behind the chair, removed the gag. "Now we can talk turkey," he declared, planting himself before Wally, cloth gag balled in one hand, the other thrust in a pocket.

"What 'turkey'?" Wally retorted, working his cramped mouth. "Don't think you can——"

"Don't stall," said Arnstein unpleasantly. "I want that notebook you copped to-night. What did you do with it?"

Wally grinned coldly. "All your trouble for nothing, eh?"

"Not for nothing," Danny Arnstein answered flatly. "I've got you, ain't I? Now I want the notebook."

"Look for it, then."

Slowly Arnstein thrust the wadded gag into his pocket.

"I always liked you pretty well," he remarked in that same flat voice.

"Interesting," Wally murmured. "I don't know whether I can say the same thing about you."

Arnstein ignored that. "I thought you were a pretty wise guy."

"Flattering."

"And now you turn out to be a sucker."

"I'm not the sucker. It's you, Arnstein. What do you think will come out of all this?"

"Nothing—for me," Arnstein answered with a shrug. "I've got *you*—see? And you're the only one who'll make any trouble. Laugh that off and get wise."

THERE was something in his tone, his apparent lack of rancor, that made Wally look at him closely. For the first time he realized that he was helpless. Probably no one knew that he was down here under the club. Violence had happened already in this business. It could again.

"Spit it out," Wally said slowly. "You don't get the book. Now what?"

"Will you take a piece of change for it?" Danny Arnstein questioned. "I'll make it worth your while."

"Thanks. I'm not selling—to you."

Danny Arnstein's loose-lipped mouth tightened. "Take it or——"

"Or what?"

"You get the works!" As Danny Arnstein made that statement dispassionately, he drew his hand from his pocket, holding his gun.

"It must be serious," said Wally, staring at the gun.

"Yeah," agreed Danny Arnstein soberly.

"Will you let me go out and get the notebook?"

"Do I look like a sap myself? Tell me where it is and I'll send for it. If you're straight and promise to keep your trap closed, I'll let you go."

Danny Arnstein's glance was kin to the lidless stare of a reptile. Wally wondered how he could ever have been misled by the affable smile on that seemingly soft face, fooled into thinking the man was a harmless semicrook who pandered only to the weaknesses of Miami and Miami Beach. He saw a new Danny Arnstein now—a killer, cold, deadly.

And as Wally saw that, he realized that Arnstein was toying with him. He had no chance of getting away. Arnstein was no fool. He knew that the mere recovery of Blue-white Shelby's notebook would not mean an end to the matter.

Wally shook his head.

"The notebook stays where it is. It'll do me more good there than here. And if you're fool enough to wipe me out, you're the sap, not me."

"Maybe," said Danny Arnstein coldly. "Three minutes you get, and then *blooie!* Out you go!"

He drew a thin watch from his pocket. And his finger slowly slid the safety catch of the gun off.

A cold shiver went through Wally. He suddenly realized that he was face to face with death—and he didn't want to die. *Three minutes*——

If he turned weakling and told where the notebook was, he would probably lose anyway, lose to this round-faced, narrow-eyed crook who held all the cards.

And there wasn't a chance of getting away, of finding help. Before he could shout once Arnstein could stop his mouth.

The music had died away overhead. The muted sounds of the players around the gambling tables crept down—mockingly. Life and pleasure up there—and death waiting down here.

And Wally looked past Arnstein and saw the section of floor at the top of the steps, *slowly lifting.*

CHAPTER XI.
COME WITH US.

FOR the space of four seconds Wally stared in fascination at that widening opening. Spike O'Donnell looked silently down at the scene. Wally dropped his eyes, trying to keep elation from his face. Good old Spike! He *would* show up like this when he was needed.

"One minute!" Danny Arnstein remarked ominously.

"Listen!" Wally begged, raising his voice. "Are you really going to kill me in two minutes more if I don't tell you where that notebook is?"

"Do I look like I'm handing you a line?"

"No, you look like you'll do it," Wally answered, keeping his voice up.

Spike O'Donnell heard every word. He disappeared. Was some one at the office door? No—there was Spike again! One foot was coming noiselessly down on the top stair tread. Spike had removed his shoes! His movements were soft as a creeping shadow. One step! Two steps! Three!

"Two minutes gone!" Danny Arnstein warned in an ominous tone.

Wally gulped. To cover any noise Spike might make, he began to talk loudly, swiftly:

"You don't know what you're doing, Arnstein! You can't knock me off this way and get by with it. If I don't show up by midnight they'll start a search for me. You don't think I came here without telling some one where I was going, do you?"

Arnstein laughed contemptuously.

"Sure. I know how you guys work. You thought you were on the track of something hot and you wouldn't split with any one until you ran it down."

Spike was halfway down the steps now, crouching. In his right hand was a monkey wrench from the tool kit of the car.

"You crazy fool!" Wally said roughly to Danny Arnstein. "Put that gun up and listen to reason!"

"Thirty seconds more!" Danny Arnstein retorted through tight lips.

And Spike O'Donnell reached the bottom of the steps.

Some phychic sense—or perhaps it was the look on Wally's face, jerked Danny Arnstein's gaze around. He spit out an exclamation and whirled just as Spike struck viciously with the monkey wrench. A cry of pain was wrung from Arnstein as the steel shattered his wrist. The gun fell from his numb fingers. He struck Spike in the face with his left fist.

Spike came up through the blow with eyes snapping and lips drawn back across his teeth, came up with fist bunched about the wrench handle in a sloughing uppercut that caught Arnstein cleanly under the chin and lifted him back on his heels. Spike grabbed the gun and jammed it in Arnstein's stomach.

Arnstein froze, then slowly lifted his hands.

"That's better," Spike grunted, drawing a deep breath. "Now we'll talk about a little killin' ourselves. How'd you like a nice slug yourself? You two-timin', four-flushin' rod packer!"

Arnstein wet his lips with the end of his tongue, begged hoarsely: "Don't shoot me!"

"Shoot you, hell!" Spike growled at him. "I ought to beat your dirty face in with this gat! What's going on down here in your private murder parlor?"

"N-nothing," Arnstein stammered. The savage look had gone from his face.

"What's he up to?" Spike threw at Wally.

"See for yourself," Wally answered. "I was up in his office when Belloc came in and accused me of having the notebook. Arnstein pulled his gun on me and cold-whipped me with the end. When I woke up I was down here like this. Arnstein was just telling me I had three minutes to come across with the notebook. Where did you come from?"

"Outside," Spike grinned. "I looked through his window and saw him come out of here. When he went back I got a screw driver and wrench out of the car and jimmied the window. I figured since you weren't around upstairs something must be wrong. Arnstein, untie him!"

WHILE Spike stood watchfully by, wrench in one hand, automatic in the other, Arnstein sullenly worked on the ropes until Wally was released.

Wally stretched his cramped muscles and grinned at Spike. "The play's getting rougher."

Spike grinned back. "And how! But I'm beginning to feel rough myself. What are we goin' to do with this jaybird? Call the cops?"

Wally hesitated. "If we call them, I'm out. Jim Martin's as close-mouthed as a granite headstone. I want to study that notebook again. It must be more valuable than I thought it was from the fuss that's being kicked up over it. If there was some way of getting Arnstein out of here and taking him along until we could think it over——"

"Sure there is," Spike grinned.

"How?"

"The way I came in. Tie his hands and gag him. Make him walk up to the window. We'll black the lights, make him climb out the window, an' then we'll all drive back across the causeway nice an' chummy. How does that sound?"

"Go to hell!" Arnstein snarled sullenly.

Spike hefted the wrench. "That ain't no way to talk to a gentleman," he admonished. "Be polite, or I'll teach you manners."

Arnstein glowered at him and remained silent.

A gleam of amusement appeared in Wally's eyes. "You have ideas," he approved. "Here's everything we need to tie him up."

Wally stripped some of the loose cord from the chair and stepped to Arnstein. It was short work to truss Arnstein's arms securely behind him.

"Better gag him, too," Spike advised. "He's got a big mouth."

"No trouble about that, either," Wally chuckled.

He reached into Arnstein's coat pocket, took out the gag that had been used on himself. Without bothering to be too gentle he jammed it in Arnstein's mouth and securely fastened it in place.

Spike handed him the gun. "I'll go up and put my shoes on. Bring him along."

"Up we go," Wally said cheerfully to Arnstein, catching his arm and turning him toward the steps.

Behind the gag Arnstein made an incoherent sound, but he went obediently nevertheless.

As they came up into the office Spike switched off the lights.

Desk down in place, door softly unlocked, lights out, Spike lifted the curtain, pulled up the window, looked out and then vanished over the sill. A moment later his head appeared.

"No one around," he said under his breath. "Come on."

Arnstein clambered awkwardly over the sill. Spike helped him down to the ground. Wally followed. Spike pulled the shade down and closed the window. He was chuckling softly as he stepped to the ground and picked up the case.

"I'll put this back an' meet you at the car."

A few moments later they rolled out of the grounds; and as they neared the street lights, Spike suggested:

"Better take that gag off him. He won't make any noise, because it means a cop."

Wally removed the gag. With Arnstein glowering in silence between them they drove down the main street of Miami Beach and over the city causeway to Miami. Spike turned down Biscayne Boulevard and shortly after they drew up at the side of his house.

"Let's go in and have a drink and talk it over," Spike commented cheerfully, getting out. "Something tells me there's a hot time ahead."

"I feel that way, too," Wally confessed as he stood by watchfully with the gun while Arnstein clambered sullenly from the machine. Keeping the man between them, they walked to the side door. It opened without a key.

"I guess Jimmy's back," Spike remarked as they entered.

Wally herded Arnstein into the house, and as they came into the big front living room Spike, just ahead of them, uttered a soft oath of surprise.

The next minute Wally gasped, too.

Jimmy, Spike's assistant, was sitting on the end of the davenport. And next to him, prim, white-faced, and alert, was Sonya Wainwright!

CHAPTER XII.
CRYPTIC CODE.

"FOR the love of Mike, what are you doing here?" Spike demanded of Sonya Wainwright, planting himself in front of her.

Jimmy was a clean-cut young man with a square jaw and steady blue eyes.

"I seen a shadow against the curtain when I parked outside," he explained. "I took a peek in, and seen her fishin' around in the table drawer there. So

I sneaked in and grabbed her. I been sittin' here waitin' for you to come back. She didn't say she was a friend of yours."

"You did right, Jimmy. Sister, what's the game? What are you prowlin' my house for?"

Sonya Wainwright still wore the soft, black coat belted about her slim figure. The smile that had been on her face before was gone now. She looked pale, tense, weary, as her eyes went from Spike to Wally and then to Arnstein.

Instead of answering Spike's question directly she indicated Arnstein. "Why is he tied up like that?"

"Never mind. We're takin' your case now, sister. Come through."

During that exchange of remarks Wally had been eying Sonya Wainwright intently. All his doubts of her were revived stronger than ever. She had been prowling Belloc's house when he had first seen her. Now here she had been caught red-handed in Spike's home. Was she only a cheap sneak thief after all, or was she connected with Arnstein, with Belloc, with the countess——

Sonya Wainwright did not answer Spike's last question.

Spike asked Jimmy: "What did she get?"

Jimmy shrugged. "I don't know. I left everything until you get back."

"Stand up, sister," Spike ordered.

Silently Sonya Wainwright got to her feet.

Spike patted her pockets. And from the right pocket he brought out a small leather-bound notebook.

"Here's what she was after," he said, giving it to Wally.

It was the notebook he had taken from the countess in the Southern Cross Hotel, glanced through hurriedly here in Spike's house, and then left in the table drawer while they went to Arnstein's Club Poinsettia.

"I guess she's one of them," he said slowly, fingering the notebook. "It's pretty clear proof. They must have followed us some way and got wise the notebook was here."

And there was disappointment in Wally's voice. He had fought stubbornly against the idea of associating Sonya Wainwright with all that had happened.

Sonya Wainwright's brown eyes rested on him soberly. She remained silent.

"What have you got to say about it?" Wally asked her harshly.

"Nothing."

"You admit you came here to steal this?"

"Yes."

Arnstein had been staring at her intently. Now he asked thickly: "What the hell do *you* want with it?"

The hint of a smile touched her lips.

"You should know—since we're supposed to be working together."

Arnstein glared at Wally. "What's the idea of this play? You bring her to Belloc's as a reporter on your sheet—and now you accuse her of prowling the house and being hooked up with *me?* Is it a fast one to get me to talk?"

His words carried the ring of sincerity. A troubled frown wrinkled Wally's forehead as he looked at Sonya and Arnstein. Who was telling the truth?

"I caught her prowling Belloc's house, and she asked me to take her in to the party," he said slowly. "She wanted to meet a man. I guess it was Shelby. Now I find her here. And so you don't know her?"

"Never saw her before to-night!" Arnstein swore. "An' I'll bet Shelby never, either!"

"What about it?" Wally asked Sonya Wainwright sternly.

And he got another suggestion of a smile in return.

"You seem to have enough ideas with-

out my adding to them," Sonya Wainwright told him. "I was caught in the house here. What are you going to do about it?"

"Keep you right here until I find out what it's all about," said Wally curtly. "Let's see what's so valuable about this notebook."

He drew a chair up to the table, opened the notebook, started through it.

THERE were many pages given over to names and addresses in various cities over the country, and many in Europe. Some of them were followed by figures running into the thousands of dollars.

Other pages carried totals of figures, the significance of which was unreadable.

There were cryptic messages also, such as:

Meet T, 8:30 p. m.; H V, Chi.

But it was not until the last written page or so that Wally found anything which carried apparent significance. Then he found:

A—250 g—
Ciudad de Santiago—Havana—19
No name Key—daybreak—20th.

Wally lighted a cigarette and frowned at that page. His mind flashed back to the conversation between Belloc and the countess in Blue-white Shelby's room at the Southern Cross Hotel. Belloc had said bitterly to the countess:

"You like Arnstein well enough to go to him for backing!"

And the countess had answered: "When we couldn't get it from you! But he bled us through the nose for it!"

He turned to Arnstein and shot out a question. "Did Shelby get two hundred and fifty grand from you?"

The question startled Arnstein. He wet his lips quickly, denied uneasily: "No! If it says that in there it's a lie!"

And that convinced Wally that it was the truth. These few cryptic lines were the key.

He looked at his watch. After midnight! It was now the morning of the twentieth!

"Look at this and see what you make of it," he asked Spike.

Spike came and peered over his shoulder, read the page, grunted: "Don't look like much, does it?"

Wally noticed Arnstein and Sonya Wainwright looking at them fixedly, listening to every word uttered. He closed the notebook, got to his feet. "Let's go back in the kitchen. Jimmy can watch them."

In the kitchen they looked at the notebook again. "I don't get this about the Ciudad de Santiago," said Spike. "And what about 'No name Key'?"

"If we knew what it was all about we'd have something to work on," Wally muttered, scrutinizing the writing. "I've got a lot of ideas, but I don't know which of them is right."

At that moment they heard the telephone in the front room ring sharply. And a moment later Jimmy's voice answering it.

That was followed almost immediately by a crash, a shout from Jimmy.

CHAPTER XIII.
RENDEZVOUS.

WHAT the devil!" Spike burst out, charging from the room. Wally followed. They both reached the front room just as Jimmy plunged through the remnants of a broken screen in one of the windows.

"He busted out while I was at the phone!" Jimmy flung back at them.

They heard his feet hammer across the porch, saw him leap the front railing into the darkness.

Without a word Spike went after him, with Wally close behind. The night was pitch dark. Jimmy had disappeared

around the side of the house. It was some moments before Wally's eyes could make out anything as he blundered forward.

Spike's house was surrounded by several vacant lots, covered with palm trees, jack pine, palmetto scrub and other growth.

Spike called: "Where did he go?"

Somewhere ahead in the night Jimmy's baffled voice answered angrily: "He came back this way!"

They spread out, began to search the area systematically; but after five minutes of that they came together and confessed defeat.

"Damn this darkness!" Spike swore. "He's probably half a mile away by now!"

"Get a flashlight," Wally suggested.

"How about the girl?" Spike demanded.

"Clear forgot her," Wally confessed irritably. "I suppose she's gone, too."

"Sweet mess we've made of things," Spike grumbled as he and Wally started back to the house. They went in the side entrance, and as their footsteps echoed in the hall, Sonya Wainwright called from the front room: "Did you get him?"

"Are you still here?" Wally answered, hurrying in there.

Sonya Wainwright was seated on the couch, looking at him coolly. "Why not?" she inquired.

"I don't understand you," Wally said in bewilderment, staring at her. "One moment you act like a crook, and then you do something that no crook would do."

Spike came into the room with a flashlight, astonishment written all over his face. "What's the matter, sister? Why didn't you lam, too?" he demanded.

"I want to talk to Mr. Matthews," said Sonya calmly.

Spike smiled weakly at Wally. "You must be *some* sheik. Well, I'll leave you two chin here while I go out and try to scare that guy up with this flashlight."

"Let him go," said Sonya Wainwright.

"What?"

"Let him go. I don't think he can do any harm, and the police can probably pick him up again if you want him very badly. There is something more important. May I see that book?"

"What for?" Wally countered.

"Do you think I would have taken the risk of entering this house to look for it if it wasn't important to me?"

There was spirit in her voice, and determination. Wally had to admit, as he looked at her, that she wasn't acting like a crook now.

"How did you know it was here?" he questioned.

"My room was next to Shelby's. I heard what happened in there, and went to meet you when you came out. I saw you come out of the alley and get in the roadster in front. There was a taxicab standing just ahead of it. I followed you. I was looking through the window when you glanced through the notebook and then put it in the drawer. When you left I came in to get it. Unfortunately I wasn't quick enough."

She didn't seem ashamed of the confession.

"Why did you do all that?" Wally fired at her.

"Let me see the notebook first."

WALLY handed it to her silently. Sonya Wainwright leafed through to the last page. A tiny frown came between her eyes as she studied it. "This is the twentieth, isn't it?" she asked.

"Yes."

"I think I see it all now," she said, half to herself.

"See what?"

"Blue-white Shelby and his associates have been smuggling diamonds for years," said Sonya Wainwright calmly,

looking at him. "I think a big smuggling coup is scheduled for to-night."

"What makes you think so?" Wally pressed sharply. "What do you know about it all?"

Sonya Wainwright shrugged. "I suppose I might as well tell you now. I've been after Belloc and Shelby for three months. Belloc was responsible for the arrest of my fiancé, who worked in his main office. Some funds had disappeared. Tom was innocent; but Belloc insisted that he be prosecuted. He was sentenced to twenty-five years in prison, on circumstantial evidence. Tom would have been an old man when he came out. He couldn't stand it. He tried to escape from the train on the way to prison—and was killed."

She shivered slightly at the memory, and then said:

"Tom had told me he was certain Belloc had been buying smuggled diamonds for years from this Shelby. I—I couldn't think of anything but making Belloc suffer some of the misery he had brought on us. Convicting him of buying smuggled diamonds seemed the best way. I drew the money out of the bank that we were going to use after we were married, resigned my position, and went to work. I located Shelby and began to watch him. He came here to Florida, where Belloc was, and met several others.

"I got a room in the same hotel, next to his rooms. At times I could hear them talking in the next room. Once I heard Belloc arguing with them, saying he was through. Shelby told him he wasn't, if he knew what was good for him. From what was said I think Belloc wanted to break off with them and didn't care. To-night I followed Shelby to Belloc's house. I—I thought I would find Belloc's study and see if there were any papers in there that would incriminate him. You caught me. You know the rest. I wanted to meet Shelby in circumstances that would not make him curious. You helped me. And then he was killed."

"Do you know who did it?" Wally put in.

"No. But this may help." She tapped the notebook. "I don't think Shelby's death will stop their plans to-night. And I can't do any more alone. If you're willing to help there is a reward. The government remits half of the fine to whoever is responsible for the arrest of a diamond smuggler. And the fines are very large. If you don't care to help, I'll try and get in touch with the government men. But it's so late I don't know whether I can before morning."

Sonya Wainwright's face was tense and eager as she looked at them expectantly.

Spike scratched his head. "Gee whiz! Diamond smuggling! Can you tie that? And you want us to help bust it up?"

Sonya Wainwright nodded silently.

Spike laughed shortly. "Think of a bootlegger tryin' to crab a diamond smuggler's game! Well, I've done most everything else. I'm willin' to have a shot at that. Your story sounds straight an' you could have lammed if you'd wanted to."

WALLY had eyed her fixedly as she spoke. His mind had automatically grappled with the story. Belloc selling smuggled diamonds through his huge chain of jewelry stores! What a break that would be! What a story it would make! With a nice juicy murder thrown in for good measure! And he had it all to himself!

"What makes you think something is planned for to-night?" Wally questioned.

Sonya tapped the notebook. "This. 'No Name Key—daybreak—twentieth.' One of the keys south of the mainland is called No Name Key. I saw it on a map."

"That's right," Spike agreed. "It's south of Matecumbe Key."

"There is a rendezvous scheduled there at daybreak," Sonya went on. "What can it mean but smuggling? Where would they smuggle from? Havana, of course! 'Ciudad de Santiago' means City of Santiago. That sounds like the name of a boat. Don't you see? A boat was due in Havana yesterday, the nineteenth. There's a rendezvous at daybreak this morning at No Name Key."

"I believe you're right!" Wally agreed. "I apologize. You're a pretty good scout after all."

"Apology accepted," Sonya Wainwright smiled.

"Almost one," Wally remarked, looking at his watch. "About three hours until daybreak. It's a long drive."

"You can't get there in a car," Spike objected. "The road ends at Matecumbe Island Ferry. An' there ain't enough time to make it in a boat."

"Can Jimmy pilot your plane at night?"

"Sure. He's done it. Just the thing. I'll tell him to warm up." Spike hurried out.

Wally went to the telephone, called headquarters, asked for Jim Martin. Dan Hardy was still at the desk. "Jim went home an hour ago," he stated.

"What's his number?"

Wally called the number Dan Hardy gave him. A sleepy Jim Martin answered.

"This is Wally Matthews of the *Sun*. I've got a hot tip, Jim, that has some bearing on the Belloc case. Want to come along and run it down?"

Jim Martin's voice suddenly sounded wide-awake. "What kind of a tip?"

"Not handing it out over the telephone. We're leaving in an airplane for one of the lower keys. Coming?"

"Where can I meet you?"

"Spike O'Donnell's house. And hands off Spike. He's helping."

"I don't want him for anything," Jim Martin snapped. "I'll be there." His receiver slammed on the hook.

Spike returned. "Jimmy's getting the plane ready. Guess we'd better take Arnstein's automatic and another gun."

Wally nodded.

A few moments later they heard the sputtering drone of a big plane motor warming up. Not long after that an automobile stopped with a squeal of brakes. Jim Martin hurried in.

"What's up?" he demanded.

Wally told him hurriedly.

Jim Martin's eyes were snapping when he had finished. "I ought to give you hell for obstructing justice," he declared candidly. "But you've done a lot. What about Shelby's murder?"

"No leads. Plenty of suspects for it."

"I'll work it out," said Jim confidently. "Where's the phone? I want to call headquarters and give some orders."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RED FLARE.

THE amphibian roared down the board track into the water, shot forward through the darkness shooting spray, and took the air. Jimmy, sitting stolidly before the instrument board, climbed fast and turned north. They passed the lights of the Seventy-ninth Street causeway and swung out over the ocean.

A lighted ship crawled in the Gulf Stream beneath. Jimmy swung south. To the right Miami Beach sprawled against the ocean; farther beyond, the lights of Miami twinkled brightly. Both quickly fell behind. Jimmy swung in nearer shore.

Lights grew fewer, then vanished entirely. They could make out the white fluttering plumes of small waves against the beach, and the darker masses of land. That was all. Presently they sighted Key Largo, largest and most northern

of the string of keys stretching far out in the ocean.

They made out a few lights at Rock Harbor, caught a glimpse of the narrow passage of water separating Key Largo from Plantation Key. Then came Windley Island; then Upper Matecumbe Key, with smaller keys looming darkly to the west. Lower Matecumbe Key and the lights near the ferry landing followed. It was after three o'clock now. The first faint touches of the false dawn were appearing in the east, but it was still dark when Jimmy cut the motor and called back:

"That's No Name Key ahead. What do you want to do?"

"Land offshore," Wally directed.

A half mile offshore they struck the water with a sliding rush, and quickly floated to a silent stop. Jim Martin drew a weak breath.

"I'll take autos every time. First time I was ever up."

Wally opened the window, looked out, listened. The plane rocked in the slight swell. Water slopped softly against the thin hull. The whisper of the slight surf on the sand drifted out from shore. A fish jumped not far away, fell back with a heavy splash. Other than that they floated in surroundings seemingly bereft of sound or life.

Jim Martin looked and listened, too. He commented with a slight trace of disgust: "Looks like we came on a wild-goose chase."

Wally was wondering himself. But Sonya said confidently: "I don't think so. There wasn't time to stop anything that had been planned. They would have to go through with it."

"Look at that light out there!" Jimmy called back from the front seat.

Several miles offshore a red flare had blazed out. The silent, crimson glow looked uncanny off there in the night.

"It's a signal," Sonya guessed.

A general tensing was evident. Nebulous chance had become actual fact.

"Better fly over and see what it is," Wally said softly. "If it's a small launch, land near it."

THE motor roared again. Once more they raced across the water and took the air. The flare was just dying away as the plane swooped over it. Beneath, rocking on the surface of the water, they could see the outline of a small, swift power cruiser. Jimmy banked sharply around, wing-slipped, straightened, landed easily. The plane drifted to a stop within a hundred yards of the cruiser.

A searchlight blazed out on the cabin roof. The beam swung around on them as the launch got under way. Jimmy had cut the motor, so they could talk easily. Wally had his gun out. They were all watching the strange boat.

"What are we goin' to do?" Spike husked.

"Let them make the first move," Wally suggested. "How about it, Jim?"

"Sure. That's best."

The launch motor died. They could hear the prow shearing the water as it forged slowly alongside. Water roiled at its stern as the propeller reversed. A figure crouching in the bow walked along the edge of the deck to the windows of the plane.

"We've been waiting almost an hour!" he called loudly. "Thought you weren't going to show up. Everything all right?"

"Yes," Wally answered gruffly from his open window. "Let's have it."

"That you, Blue-white?"

"Yes."

"You told me you had a seaplane chartered. And why didn't you show a light like we agreed?"

"Motor went bad and we had to take this one," Wally answered promptly. "Pass it in the window here."

"Say—*you don't sound like Blue-white!*"

The man grasped the searchlight,

swung it around. The beam glared into the cabin, full on Wally's face and the rest of them.

It was blinding. Wally looked away, blinking. And a shout of angry alarm came from the men on the cruiser deck.

"You ain't Blue-white! It's a trap! Get away, boys!"

Crash!

That was a gun exploding beside the searchlight. The red flame seemed to lick viciously at Wally's face. He heard Sonya give a low gasp of alarm; and he ducked instinctively as a second shot followed the first.

A splinter of wood from the edge of the window spun into his cheek. And then he was up, safety catch off his gun. It spat in his hand as the muzzle cleared the window.

Spike and Jim Martin were shooting also. The tiny cabin of the plane vibrated to explosions blasting in ear-splitting crescendo. An acrid powder haze drifted thick, heavy.

THE man who had shot at Wally vaulted to the other side of the cabin and dropped out of sight. The one in the bow dived over the far edge of the deck and hung by his hands. The deep bellow of the cruiser's motor, backing at full speed, drowned other noises. The plane rocked, dipped as the propeller lashed waves past the hull.

A window in the pilot house smashed. And then, suddenly, sounded the dread *rat-a-tat-tat-tat-tat* of a machine gun through a porthole back of the wheel house.

"Get down!" Wally shouted as bullets ripped through the cabin walls.

He felt a dull flick on his shoulder; knew that he had been hit there. Up in the front end Jimmy uttered a stifled cry. By this time they were all crouching low on the floor while the torrent of lead ripped over their heads.

It died away abruptly as the cruiser backed clear and swung away.

Wally lurched to his feet, felt for Sonya Wainwright. "All right?" he asked hoarsely.

"Not hurt," she answered faintly, rising, dropping in a seat.

Spike whistled softly. *"Some* tangle! Those boys can handle their artillery. Who got hit?"

"I did. In the ear!" Martin spat angrily, hauling out a handkerchief and dabbing at the side of his head. "Damn 'em! Why didn't we bring a machine gun? Don't let 'em get away! Start the motor!"

Jimmy did not answer. Spike scrambled forward to the control seat. Jimmy had lurched off it to the floor. He lay there, breathing stertorously. Spike jerked a flashlight from its holder at the side of the instrument board and played the beam over Jimmy.

"They got him bad!" he said through his teeth. "In the side of the head! We're stuck here! I can't run the damned thing!"

"I've done a little flying out at Curtiss field," Wally said hurriedly. "Drag him back here. Let me see what I can do. It's got a self-starter, hasn't it?"

"Yeah. Give me a hand!"

While they were lifting Jimmy and bringing him back in the narrow aisle, Sonya exclaimed: *"Listen!"*

The cruiser had drawn off, was running out to sea, exhaust growing fainter. And throbbing over that, coming from above, was the unmistakable drone of another motor.

An airplane motor.

CHAPTER XV.
RAMMED!

DAWN had crept in steadily. The east was gray; light was spreading over the sky. Wally eased Jimmy's head and shoulders down in the aisle, wiped blood off his hands with his handkerchief, thrust head and shoulders out one of the open windows.

He made out the faint blot of a plane, saw dull tongues of fire streaming from exhaust pipes. While he looked, the motor cut out, the plane began to glide down.

And from the fleeing cruiser a second red flare threw a ruby halo of light.

The cruiser swung about. Its searchlight began to wave to and fro. The motor of the incoming plane roared in spurts. Silhouetted against the light in the east, it was visible, dropping in a descending circle over the boat.

"A seaplane!" Wally rapped out, drawing back. "The one they were to meet, of course!"

Jim Martin groaned. "And they're going to get away!"

"Not while we're kicking." Wally started forward toward the pilot's seat. "I think I can fly this crate. See what you can do for Jimmy while I get her started."

Machine-gun bullets had smashed the glass of the instrument board, wrecked the tachometer dial, put two jagged holes through the sliding glass panels in the pilot's window. But the starter whirred when he pulled the knob.

The warm motor coughed, spun raggedly, then died away. Wally tried again—with the same result.

"Give me that light!" he called back to Spike.

Flash in hand he shoved back the window over his head, clambered up beside the motor. A swift inspection found the cause of the trouble. One of the flying bullets had knocked off the end of a spark plug.

"Any extra plugs along?" he called in to Spike.

"Behind that panel at the side of the seat."

Wally scrambled back, opened the panel, found wrenches, and the usual collection of small parts that any such kit collected, and a plug—used, dirty, but a plug. With it and a wrench he returned to the motor.

The seaplane was bobbing gently beside the cruiser now, looking like a monster gray gull with wings outspread.

Wally got the damaged plug out, tossed it into the water.

The motor of the seaplane began to thunder rhythmically as he worked. It sheered off from the cruiser, which gathered headway, too.

"Hurry up!" Martin called in exasperation. "They're getting away!"

The cruiser was swinging around sharply. Instead of heading back south, or out to sea, *it was coming toward them.*

Wally screwed the new plug in desperately, a premonition of trouble driving him.

"The boat's coming back!" he called down to the others. "I think they're going to try and get us!"

Spike climbed upon the pilot's seat and stared. "What d'you think they're going to do?"

"Give us the works! What else? They don't want us going back, evidently. Probably got their orders from that other plane!"

WALLY got the new plug in tight as he finished that, snatched the wire and clipped it in place. The cruiser was close now, coming full speed. Its bow was raised; it was shearing through a smother of white water. Wally tumbled down against Spike, shoved him out of the way as he dropped in the seat. He jerked the starter knob, pulled on the choke.

The motor spun, sucking loudly, and then caught with a ragged burst that quickly settled into an even drone. The amphibian surged forward slowly. But the motor had cooled; it began to miss as Wally nursed the throttle wide. He checked it, coaxing all the revolutions he could get.

The cruiser changed its course as they moved ahead, cutting them off. It

seemed to leap over the last hundred yards. Wally jammed the rudder over, tried to turn out of the way. The motor was picking up rapidly, but still their movements were sluggish—too sluggish.

He saw he couldn't make it.

And he had hardly realized that when the cruiser was on them.

It struck them amidships, at an angle, traveling the same way they were.

The crash of the impact was loud above the drone of the motor. The amphibian heeled far over, left float and wingtip going down under the water, right wing raking up toward the sky. The thin side of the hull split open. The wet bow of the cruiser drove through into the cabin.

Water washed clear over the cabin.

And through the spitting exhaust of the motor came the savage drum of the machine gun again.

From the cabin behind, Spike and Martin were replying with their guns.

It was a ghastly moment as the shattered plane wallowed sidewise before the momentum of the cruiser. It would have been sliced in two if the sharp bow had struck it squarely.

Wally sawed on the controls desperately. The warming motor thundered faster, faster—and suddenly with a lurch the plane drew free, staggered across the bow of the cruiser.

Spike shouted in his ear: "The whole side's split open! We're sinking!"

The wings had leveled again. Wally looked over his shoulder, saw the gleam of inrushing water already half a foot deep. Sonya was keeping Jimmy's head out of it.

If they stopped, the plane would settle, sink! He slammed the throttle ahead as far as it would go. The motor took it with a full-voiced bellow that hurled them ahead.

He stood up, cast a fleeting look behind. The cruiser had turned sharply, was coming after them. But they were going twice its speed now, faster every second. The hull began to ride the surface as Wally settled back in the seat.

Slowly, sluggishly it came up—and suddenly they were riding the air smoothly. The water was draining out of the great gash in the side.

Wally drew a great breath of relief, hauled slowly back on the stick, climbed as fast as he dared.

NOT until they were a good thousand feet up did he look for the seaplane. It had been rising off the water in a great circle. Now, as he looked, it was nowhere in sight.

Light was coming swiftly. He banked, saw the cruiser turning off to the south. Nothing they could do about that. He turned into the north, and as he studied the sky there he saw a dark blot miles away. The seaplane was heading toward Miami also!

Jim Martin staggered up to him, shouted in his ear: "Did they get away?"

For answer Wally pointed to the plane ahead.

"What are you going to do?"

"Follow them!"

"Can you catch them?"

"Don't think so!"

The seaplane swerved across the keys, bearing to the west; and it quickly became apparent that it was taking the most direct course to Miami, cutting across the tip of the mainland.

In a short time they were flying over savannah grass, skirting the swampy solitude of the Everglades. Jimmy remained unconscious. Once, looking back, Wally saw Spike with his coat off, mopping at blood on his side. He had been hit also in that last rain of lead.

A wedge of light struck in through the huge gash in the hull. And all about it were the sievelike spots where bullets had punctured. Death had passed them close.

The amphibian, for all its bulk, was powered for speed. The even thunder of the big motor was like music. The air-speed indicator quivered well over the hundred mark. And the dark blot of the seaplane remained in sight.

It was full daylight now. They were drawing over to the sea again. The sun was a blazing disk over the eastern horizon. And they sighted the tall white tower of the courthouse, spearing up over the rest of the city! .

Martin was standing behind Wally now, looking forward intently at the other plane. Together they saw it swing over the glistening blue of Biscayne Bay, where the white sails of the early fishing boats were tacking out along the channel. They saw it swing north over the south end of Miami Beach—out over the ocean, and then dive back in for the beach.

A few moments later Wally called: "It's landing at Arnstein's place!"

A wide smile of grim satisfaction creased Martin's face.

"Good enough! Follow them!"

SEVERAL minutes later the amphibian roared out over the sea front also, farther than the seaplane had done, and circled back. This was what Wally had feared. He could get into the air, he could fly—but what about the landing?

The seaplane had run to the edge of the beach. Back of it was the long veranda and low building of the Club Poinsettia, nestling in the palms.

Wally swooped low, put the amphibian into an even glide, held it as level as possible—and hoped for the best. The beach glided at them. The water came up to meet them. When it seemed just under the hull he dropped the tail, and they fell hard into a smother of spray that quickly subsided.

He jazzed the motor; the craft plowed toward the beach and grounded heavily. Wally cut the motor. A few yards away the deserted seaplane was floating. Wally went out over the bow and leaped to the sand. Spike and Martin came after him.

"They must have gone in the club!" Wally said.

"There's a couple of autos around back!" Spike snapped.

Sonya Wainwright joined them.

"Stay with the plane!" Wally threw at her. "This is no business for you!"

On the veranda their feet echoed in the still morning quiet. Wet footmarks were visible on the wood.

"They came this way all right!" exclaimed Wally.

The door was locked. It was heavy timber. Martin stepped to a window, picked a chair from one of the tables and smashed the pane. The glass shattered loudly on the floor inside.

"Not regular," Martin said grimly. "But neither is all this."

He stepped through the broken window, gun in hand, and Spike and Wally followed him. The big gambling hall was deserted.

Wally pointed silently to wet marks on the linoleum-covered floor—marks leading to the door of Arnstein's office. Martin strode there and grabbed the knob.

The door was locked.

"Open up!" Martin called. "I'm an officer!"

He was not answered.

Jim drew back a few steps, hurled himself at the door. One of the thin panels cracked in. Another lunge broke it out. Looking past Jim through the jagged opening Wally saw the woman he knew as the countess backed against the desk. She wore a tight-fitting coat, a small, open-faced black hat, and there was sheer animal rage on her beautiful, hard face.

On the other side of the desk was the man Wally had fought with for the notebook, and a younger, lean-faced man who still wore a pilot's leather helmet.

The countess raised a small, pearl-handled revolver. Her voice quivered with fury.

"Get back from there!" she spat. "I don't know who you are! I'll shoot!"

Martin scowled through the door at her.

"Shoot me—and the three of you will stand trial for murder," he said through his teeth. "I'm from police headquarters. I'm coming in there. There's no charge of murder against you yet. Don't make one!"

He reached through the broken opening for the key inside the lock.

"Stop that!" the countess shrilled—and even Martin froze before the fury in her voice.

CHAPTER XVI.
BROKEN.

THE heavy, fleshy face of the man she had called "Matt" earlier in the night was set in a scowl of indecision. Suddenly he stepped forward. "Don't shoot him, you fool!" he ordered roughly. "It's bad enough as it is!"

"Don't tell me what to do!" the countess flashed. And she shot.

Matt, reading her purpose, knocked her arm up as she did so. The bullet smashed into the top of the door. Matt grappled with her, took the gun away, sent her spinning to the other side of the room with a sweep of his arm.

"I always said you didn't have any sense!" he bawled angrily.

Martin had ducked at the shot. Now he reached in again, unlocked the door, shoved it open.

Matt tossed the pearl-handled gun on the desk.

"There it is!" he growled sullenly. "We aren't armed. What do you want? What's your charge?"

"Turn around."

Jim Martin quickly frisked both men, ordered them over against the wall. While he was doing that Wally looked around the office. There was no sign of a suit case or packages they had brought in.

Running feet sounded in the next room. Craven and two uniformed men appeared in the door. Sonya Wainwright appeared behind them.

"We heard a shot!" Craven panted. "Anybody hurt?"

"Not yet," Martin said sourly. And he said to Wally: "I called headquarters before we left and ordered this place watched. I figured Arnstein might come back. Did you get him, Craven?"

"He was here when we got here. We watched the place. No one left."

"Well, Arnstein doesn't seem to be here now!" Martin snapped. "Where is he?"—the last to Matt.

Matt shrugged sullenly. "How should I know? I'm not his keeper!"

Wally stepped to the desk, tipped it back, peered down. The room below was lighted. But as he looked there was a loud *pop!* A flash of blinding light! The room below went dark!

"What's that down there?" Martin rasped.

"The room I told you about," Wally replied, peering into the pitch blackness beneath. "Arnstein, come on out! Martin, from headquarters, is up here waiting for you!"

There was no answer, no sign that any living person was down there.

"He broke the light bulb. He's hiding down there in the dark," Wally said over his shoulder.

Martin's answer was to snatch up a newspaper out of the wastebasket beside the desk, light the corner and start down the steps. "We'll bring him up!" he snapped.

They reached the bottom together. The flaming paper threw light and flickering shadows about the room. *It was empty.*

"Where did he go? Is there another way out of here?" Martin demanded.

"Don't know."

The remains of the broken light globe were in the fixture.

"Spike, bring a globe down here!" Wally called up.

Spike unscrewed a bulb in the office and came down with it. Wally screwed it in; and as the bright light blazed out Martin trod on the last of the burning paper. They could see plainly now. The room was empty. On the floor lay the book that had broken the light bulb. The oatmeal-papered walls looked blank and solid.

"He must have thrown that book from across here," Wally said, going to the opposite side of the room. "He was probably standing near the exit then. It must be in this wall."

He began to pound the panels as he spoke. One gave forth a hollow sound.

"Behind here!"

"Try and break it in."

WALLY'S first hard lunge against the wall produced results. The panel buckled in, revealing a narrow door, its edges hidden behind wooden strips that separated the panels.

On the other side a gun roared. A bullet punctured the panel and ripped through the side of Wally's coat.

Martin's gun spat twice in reply.

A voice on the other side wailed: "Don't shoot! I'll come out!"

"Come on, then!" Martin raged.

But the door did not open. Wally drew back, lunged against it once more, jumping aside the next instant. The door sagged in. There were no further shots.

Martin stepped aside out of range and ordered again: "Come on out before I start shooting."

There was no reply.

He kicked the door clear open. They looked into a small lighted room—*empty.*

There was a narrow table on one side with several pieces of apparatus on it and half a dozen containers. A chair was beside it and a cot was on the other side, with a narrow aisle between. And at the other end was a board door, closed.

"He skipped out that way!" Martin shouted, running to it and jerking it open.

A low, narrow, dark tunnel was revealed. And as Martin looked in it the muffled scrape of feet came from beyond. The officer plunged in, gun ready. Wally followed.

The air was close and cool in the tunnel. It ran straight for a full hundred yards, perhaps more. Martin was running as fast as he could. Once he bumped his head and swore loudly as he groped on. A faint patch of light became visible before them, then blacked out again. When they reached the spot they found the end of the tunnel.

"Steps here!" Jim panted.

He fumbled overhead, gave a grunt as he heaved. And a section over their heads swung up. They clambered up, found themselves in a small coral-rock building, evidently used as a storehouse for empty cases, old furniture and such effects. The trapdoor Jim had pushed up was a concealed part of the floor.

There was one small window and a door standing ajar. They burst out of it—and saw two running figures halfway to the two automobiles that stood behind the club building. One of them was Arnstein, a suit case banging his legs as he ran.

"Stop!" Jim shouted.

The two ran harder than ever. Jim stood still, raised his gun, aimed carefully and shot.

ARNSTEIN'S companion stumbled, pitched forward on hands and knees. Arnstein tripped over him with an oath. The wounded man scrambled up and staggered aside, clutching his knee.

Arnstein started to get up—and suddenly pitched back to earth again. He twitched for a moment and lay still.

"What the devil!" Martin exclaimed, running forward. "I didn't hit both of them with one shot, did I? For the love of heaven, look who we got!"

The wounded man was Anthony Belloc.

He stood at bay with pain-twisted face, nursing his knee. "You've got me!" he groaned. "Get me to a doctor quick! You've smashed my knee!"

"It won't kill you," Martin told him callously. "What's the matter with Arnstein?"

"I don't know," Belloc groaned. "He tripped over me and swore. And then dropped when he tried to get up."

"Here, get up!" Martin said loudly, catching Arnstein's shoulder and shaking it.

Arnstein lay motionless. He rolled over inertly when Jim Martin pulled the shoulder. His jaw hung slack; his eyes were open and protruding. Color was already fading from his face.

"He's dead!" Jim Martin blurted out.

He dropped to his knees beside the body and felt for the heart.

"What's this? His shirt is all wet!" As Martin said that he drew his hand forth and sniffed at the fingers.

Martin suddenly staggered and lurched forward; would have fallen if Wally had not caught him.

"What's the matter?" Wally cried, supporting him.

"Look out—don't smell stuff—poison!" Martin gasped, reeling in his grasp, and holding his damp fingers away from his body as he did so.

Two uniformed men came running up, and one of the men from Arnstein's office followed. There was nothing they could do at the moment.

Martin drew in great gulps of air, slowly recovered possession of his faculties. He shivered as he straightened and looked down at Arnstein. And then, gingerly, he went to the body with an effort and knelt beside it.

Holding his breath, he hastily patted the front of the coat, stood up and stepped away before he drew a great gulp of air into his lungs.

"He had a bottle in his inside coat pocket," Jim said to Wally. "When he fell he broke it. Only one thing could act like that. Look at the pupils of his eyes. The fumes rose up around his face and he got a lungful before he knew what had happened. It was too late then. It was hydrocyanic acid. We know who killed Blue-white Shelby now."

"There was bad blood between them, according to what that woman in there said in the Southern Cross Hotel," Wally commented.

Martin nodded. "That's it. He got him that way. Let's see what's in the suitcase."

IT was unlocked. Jim opened it there on the sand. Several dozen small, stout cardboard boxes were inside. Jim opened one of them. Little packets of tissue paper were inside. And as he unfolded one the bright rays of the morning sun filtering down through the palm tops glittered and winked on several dozen small unset diamonds.

"I thought so!" Martin said under his breath, reaching for a second packet.

It held another lot of stones. All the boxes were filled with similar packets.

"Must be a million dollars' worth of stones in here," Martin said, closing the suitcase. "How about it, eh, Belloc? Isn't that right?"

"Two million and a half," Belloc muttered heavily. "Arnstein told me that. I don't know anything about it. I—I just happened to be here. Arnstein asked me to come downstairs, and the trouble broke while we were there. He made me come along with him. I didn't know what he was up to. I thought it was a—raid."

"A raid, eh? You didn't know anything about smuggled diamonds?"

"I refuse to talk any more until I can see my lawyer."

The officer shrugged. "Suit yourself. You'll have plenty of talking to do later. You and the others. I guess we've got enough evidence, and we'll see if we can't make a few more arrests when we find out who was in that boat that brought this stuff in. Men, arrest him. Leave the body there. Not safe to get too near it right now. Matthews, come along. I want to see something else."

They entered the clubhouse by the front door. The others were still in the office, guarded by Spike, Craven, and one of the bluecoats.

"Be back in a minute," Martin said, setting the suitcase on the floor and hurrying down the steps.

He returned in several minutes.

"Arnstein killed Shelby," he stated curtly. "He made the stuff himself, so it couldn't be traced, I guess. I thought I saw some chemical apparatus on the table when we went through that second room. It wouldn't mean much to me if I hadn't studied up on it on that other case I mentioned. He's got a box of ant powder down there and a small bottle of sulphuric acid. The ant formula he's using is cyanide of potassium. Put it in an ant hill, pour water over it and it generates fumes that kill the ants. Take the same stuff, pour sulphuric acid and water over it, condense the fumes, and you get anhydrous hydrocyanic acid—one of the deadliest poisons known. He got a simple chemist's still to work with, and there's a couple of small glass tubes he used to make capsules. When he tried to get away he evidently took the extra acid he had made to throw it away. And he fell and broke the bottle. It finished him as quickly as it did Shelby."

A tigerish smile of joy illuminated the countess's face.

"The rat got what was coming to him!" she said with emphasis. "I *thought* he was trying to double-cross us some way! He wanted the hog end of everything, and I guess he figured with Bluewhite out of the way it would be easier to get."

MARTIN inhaled from his cigarette. "And he ruined everything. I guess you'll all get what's coming to you. And Miss Wainwright, you'll get what's coming to you, too. I'll turn this stuff over to the government men at once. The reward will be enough to keep you pretty the rest of your life."

Sonya Wainwright had been a silent spectator. Now she smiled slightly.

"Keep *us*," she corrected. "You and Mr. O'Donnell and his man will share. And Mr. Matthews, of course. It was really his work at the last that made all this possible."

"Yeah, *he'll* get his share," Spike said under his breath. "The sheik!"

There was no mistaking Spike's meaning, and Sonya Wainwright blushed. Wally scowled at him, said hurriedly:

"Jimmy's got to be taken care of, and I have to get down to the paper. Miss Wainwright, can I take you in town?"

"Why—why, yes."

Spike was incorrigible. As they went out the door they heard him say wickedly: "He gets the reward and the girl, too. Can you beat that?"

Wally slammed the door behind them.

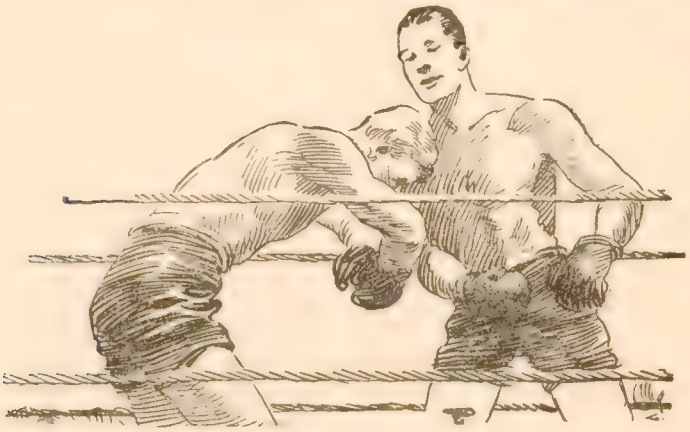
"The idiot!" he said indignantly as they walked through the silent gambling room.

"I think he is quite an intelligent man," Sonya Wainwright murmured.

Wally was still trying to figure that out as they left the Club Poinsettia and walked through the bright sunlight.

T. T. Flynn's stories are published regularly in this magazine.

The Man Who Knew Them All from Sullivan down Predicts the Outcome of the Schmeling-Stribling Scrap.



Stribling's the Boy—Maybe

By

WILLIAM HEMMINGWAY

MAX SCHMELING has a punch that would drop an ox, and so has Willie Stribling. The one who lands it first in that mid-Western ring on the third of July will win the big title. On that great day one of the two will give the world a surprise party, will show stuff that no one thus far has believed he had in him.

The bout will last ten rounds or less, so the boys are bound to go fast; for in thirty minutes of actual punching every second of the time must be used for all it is worth. It will be a great show.

In youth, height, weight, reach and speed they are as evenly matched as two men can be. Stribling has had much more ring experience than the German, has fought three times as many years—he began while still a high-school boy—and has kept it up constantly, resting only when he was in danger of going stale. Max, with excellent natural gifts, had engaged in less than a hundred fights, learning fast and always improving, up to the time unlucky Jack Sharkey fouled him last fall and the New York Commission kindly gave him the crown while he lay writhing on the floor.

When he was able to get up and talk without groaning, Max swore he would fight Sharkey right over again—fight any man in the world. He was the rightful champion and he could prove it. But on sober second thought, he decided to ignore Sharkey's sorrowful plea for

another chance and to let all the others go whistle for a fight. The title hypnotized him into laziness, as it did all but Gene Tunney the thinker. Max hurried home and lived the life of Reilly, German style.

True, he did put away a few whiffenpoofs in exhibition bouts, fellows who didn't know which hand he hit them with, but he has not had a real fight since Sharkey wrecked him. German sportsmen accused him of being afraid of Sharkey and tried to shoo him back into the ring, but he only laughed at them and went on his merry way.

But let no one think he is not ready for battle now. That title and the million dollars or more he can pump out of it have inspired him to work hard in a long job of training that has put him in wonderful condition—physically. His mental and nervous condition, on which so much depends, we can only speculate about until he actually begins to fight—when it will be too late to do anything about it.

Battles are won, not by powerful muscles and high speed alone, but by the man who can outthink the other fellow and hit him where he does not expect it. And, no matter how robust a fighter is or how he is bursting with energy, the quickness of his thought and the accuracy of his timing and hitting will be below par if he has not sharpened his senses by plenty of fighting. Not by mauling timid sparring partners, who are afraid to hurt him, but by actual fighting with men who are in there to out him if they can.

From the time of Sullivan down through Corbett, Jeffries, Johnson, and even the great Dempsey, champions have gone down to defeat because they neglected their battle practice. When they came to, they knew what beat them—but you can't keep the title by remembering what you ought to have done.

Yet there is no reason to believe that Schmeling has thrown away his chances of victory by lazy neglect. He has shown himself intelligent in many ways, and he may have found some method of tuning himself up to concert pitch for this battle that no one else has ever thought of before.

After his early victories in Germany, where he watched Jack Dempsey box and became ambitious to fight like him as well as look like him, he came to this country. He quit his manager and got into expensive lawsuits to break away from him and tie up with a group of Americans who promised to land him in the big money. But his early campaign in the land where the game has reached its highest development shows that he plans his fights with care.

Max watched first-class men of all weights in their battles, and picked up many a useful bit of wisdom as he chatted and laughed at the ringside without taking his eyes off the fighters. He beat a few third-raters before taking on any really good man. Best indication of all, he steadily improved in every battle; and it was only after he had become ringwise that he began to meet the second-raters.

The German mind is noted for the thoroughness with which it studies every problem before planning the way to work through it. It may well be that Max has discovered some method that will enable him to fight the battle of his life against Stribling—certainly he will need everything he has, even more than he showed against Sharkey or any of his other opponents. He may have this added power or he may not, and a lively curiosity about what he will be able to do is going to draw several thousand fans to the ringside.

A BIG part of Tunney's preparation to best Dempsey, as you remember, was his careful study, day after day, of a moving-picture film which showed Jack boxing. During his time in the studios of Hollywood—poor

place for a fighting man!—where directors want profile pictures as well as full face, Jack contracted the habit of turning his head to one side just before he jumped in to attack.

Tunney noticed this dangerous habit, which left the champion open to a blow perfectly timed, ran the film slowly over and over again, and figured the exact fraction of a second that Jack's head was turned, as well as the surest way to nail him on the chin with a swift, straight right.

Gene applied big-business principles to the fight game. He practiced that swift punch a million times or more, and he would have outed Jack with his first blow if it had not landed a shade too high; but he got it home later—also got the title. No one but he and Billy Gibson knew about this careful bit of strategy until after the battle, not even the sparring partners or any of the visitors at the training camp; for if the word had leaked out Jack would have never turned his head and left himself open for the blow.

Whatever scheme Schmeling may have developed for his attack on Stribling will not be known until after the fight, but you may be sure that he and Joe Jacobs, his crafty manager, are leaving nothing undone to make things hot for Willie, and it is possible that they have something that will help a lot. Pictures of the Georgian are easy enough to get, though no picture study can take the place of fighting.

Ten months of idleness make a fighter rusty. Tunney had both the pictures and plenty of battles while he was getting ready to take the title. Probably, too, he disturbed the peace of Jack's goat when he flew in an airplane from his quarters to the ringside just before the fray. How could one man show more contempt for another than by enjoying a little picnic in the air on the way to meet him in the ring?

What has the Georgia boy besides a keen appetite for glory and cash? Born of a family of acrobats, whose lives have been spent in good training, Stribling has been in prime condition during all his life. Rugged strength and endurance, inherited and cultivated, will be of great help to him in the battle of July 3d.

The acrobatic business is a bit of a handicap, too; for it has had a lot to do with developing in him a style of cautious tapping and clinching that have earned him the nickname of "Willie the Clutch." Too bad it had to happen that way, for Willie is a good, game lad and willing to fight. If he had been caught young and taught by a master as good as Jim Corbett—no; there is none quite so good as Corbett—but imagine what Willie would be if he had grown up in that school of the art! Who could stand before him?

As it is, he has toured the country for years in his big motor van, paying neither railroad fares nor hotel bills, knocking out local prides by the score and banking hundreds of thousands of dollars, even while he also collected countless boos and razzberries by his prudent, wrestling style of fighting.

Pa Stribling, a fine business man, made the matches and trained Willie; Ma Stribling presided over the traveling home on wheels, especially over the kitchen, which plays such an important part in building up strength and endurance, while a tutor gave the boy lessons every day and prepared him to enter college. Willie did not care to go to college, which may be just as well; for he might possibly be better off as champion than as a run-of-the-mill Ph.D.

His worst public showing was when he met Sharkey in the ring at Miami, and put up an exhibition of pulling and hauling and tin-canning that disgusted every one who saw it or even heard of it. Sharkey was just as bad. Of course, each of them had the highest respect for

the other; so that perhaps it was a case of "one was afraid and tother dassent," as a husky friend of mine remarked; but the net result was one of the smelliest "battles" that ever wasted people's time and money. Miami has never recovered from the shock. There was no lack of courage in either man, but their eagerness to grab the title that would bring in a flood of money spoiled their style. The love of money can be a heavy handicap.

YET when Stribling feels that he has an edge on a man, he throws away his shuffling and wrestling and trims him like a master. Phil Scott was one of England's best men, bigger than Willie, full of style and speed, but the boy knocked him out so cold that when he came back to this world he gave up fighting and took to running a beauty parlor in London. Willie had given him a permanent K. O.

The boy did still better when he met Otto von Porat last year at the Chicago Stadium. Otto had beaten a long line of good men, and they were beginning to boom him as the challenger for the title. He was all set to go in against Schmeling as soon as he returned from Germany, and meanwhile he made a match with "Young" Stribling as a sort of warming-up gallop. It was—too warm.

At the first gong a new Stribling burst into action. He flew at Von Porat with the speed of a Corbett and the power of a Dempsey, and punched him with each hand as accurately as the thrusts of a sword. Von Porat tried his best to block, to clinch, to sidestep out of the reach of this furious punching machine; but Stribling stepped back an instant and charged in again with such a swarm of straight and heavy punches that the eye could not count them.

Von Porat was overwhelmed, confused, helpless under the blinding attack. For the fraction of a second he left his chin exposed. It was enough. Stribling's straight right fist flashed across, and Von Porat dived to the floor, out colder than a wedge. All done in less than two minutes of the first round. People were so stunned that they forgot to cheer. They knew it could not be true, yet there it was—Willie the Clutch doing one of the best bits of fighting ever seen in the ring.

Yet not long afterward Willie fell from grace. He made such a slow, uninteresting battle with Arthur de Kuh, who is anything but a first-class man, that the crowd booed and groaned in disgust. De Kuh could not be compared with Von Porat, whom Willie put down and out so easily, and there was no reason to respect him, but the boy handled him as if he was afraid he was full of dynamite that would go off if he struck it. Perhaps Willie was like a track-sore race horse, tired of going through the same performance again and again and again, mentally stale, tired of the monotony. Yet it is part of the business of a good manager to keep his athlete from falling into such a state.

Poor Jack Sharkey, feeling low in his mind because people remembered him chiefly by the foul blow with which he laid Schmeling low—and incidentally made him a gift of the world championship—challenged Stribling, offering to give his services free and asking the Georgian to do the same, so that the money could go to help the New York unemployed.

Strib referred the offer to his father, who is his teacher, second, manager, best friend and severest critic—quite a job! —but Pa said he was sorry not to be able to fight Mr. Sharkey just then because Willie was already engaged for a battle in Chicago with Mr. Gerald Ambrose Griffiths, better known as "Tuffy" Griffiths. The betting was two to one on Stribling.

When they clashed in the Stadium, Stribling ran into a surprise party.

Griffiths was at his best, only one pound heavier than Willie of Georgia, but he was many pounds more aggressive. At the call of the bell he flew at Stribling with his left fist working like an automatic pistol on Strib's chin, meanwhile keeping his own chin well covered by his shoulder, so that he would be safe from Strib's right counter and the fate of Von Porat.

Fifteen thousand Chicagoans yelled with delight while Griffiths beat a devil's tattoo on Willie's jaw and had him floundering like a novice. But there was not much force in his blows, and presently Willie tied Tuffy's arms in a tight clinch, so that he could do no more harm.

Strib woke up in the second round and made a better showing, but Griffiths, fighting better than he had ever fought before, kept him busy. Strib sent drive after drive into Tuffy's midsection, seemingly with great force, but the Chicago lad did not slow down for a moment.

Strib seemed to be doing his best, but he did not make much headway against Griffiths, though he threw him on the ropes, roughed him and hauled him about, and once Tuffy complained to the referee that Stribling chopped him on the back of the neck—the rabbit punch.

THE Georgian began to look serious after this, fought a little more aggressively, but still was far below the form he showed against Von Porat. He made the pace, held Griffiths safe and cuffed him about as he pleased, though without enough steam in his blows to do much harm.

In the ninth round Willie did his best work. He landed a right uppercut on Tuffy's jaw, perfectly timed and with a terrific kick in it. Griffiths staggered and half fell into a clinch. He nearly sprawled on the floor. Stribling hammered his ribs with left hooks, but the other was still fighting at the bell.

Griffiths was not badly shaken; for after a minute's rest he came out fresh for the tenth round. Moreover, he made the pace and took a good lead. Stribling contented himself with coasting along, knowing that he was still well in front. The referee and judges agreed that Stribling had won six of the rounds, with one even and three to the credit of Griffiths, and therefore gave Strib the decision.

He earned it, all right, but the crowd felt that they had not got a run for their money, which by the way was supposed to go to the fund for unemployed. The unemployed received twenty-five per cent of the gate—but even a quarter of a loaf is better than no bread.

In Stribling's bouts with Griffiths and with Sharkey he appears at his worst, suffering from overconfidence in one and too much caution in the other. Yet his swift and relentless overthrow of Von Porat shows how he can perform when stung by harsh criticism into doing his best. While he is a most enthusiastic money hunter, he is also a first-class fighting man. And, when he is driven by the roar of the angry crowd into trying for all he is worth, he puts on a fight that you will go miles to see.

At this moment Willie is in the position of Jim Jeffries when he met Bob Fitzsimmons for the championship. Looking for easy money before training for that battle, Jeff undertook to knock out two men in one evening at Madison Square Garden. He was short of work, and after he had finished a poor bout with Bob Armstrong, a big Negro in prime condition, he was not able to tackle the second man.

What a panning the crowd gave poor Jeff! It looked for a while as if he was going to be laughed out of his chance to meet Fitz, but the contract was made and had to be carried out. Jeff trained faithfully, and, taught by Tommy Ryan, learned to crouch and use his straight left so effectively that Fitz could not hit

him in the body. Thousands of fight fans went to Coney Island that night to see the big boiler maker knocked into a cocked hat; but they saw him fight like a master of the art and knock Fitzsimmons out in the eleventh round.

You see, a battle for the championship is a very different matter from a mere exhibition to draw in the money. Stribling to-day is a target for the abuse of fans who do not look at the whole picture but see only the dark side. Stribling has all the stuff needed to make a champion, if he will use it. And the chances are that he will use it—for this is the last call in the dining car for Willie.

Jack Dempsey has gone on record with his opinion that Stribling is the best of the big men to-day. He says: "While Sharkey remained idle, waiting for the chance for another crack at Schmeling, Stribling has engaged in many contests. In the past year he has knocked out Phil Scott and Otto von Porat, and beaten Tuffy Griffiths. He is, in my opinion, the hope of America. To him, I think, we must look to retain the supremacy in the heavyweight ranks; for it is my opinion that if Sharkey has ten more opportunities to win the crown, he still will fall short of the mark."

Undoubtedly there is a lot of personal grievance in Jack's remarks about Sharkey, for the Sailor has long complained that Jack knocked him out with a foul punch, though the fact is that Jack copped him on the wagging chin when he turned his head to speak to the referee; but Dempsey's grievance against Sharkey does not affect his judgment of Stribling. And, if any one objects that champions and ex-champions have nearly always made mistakes in picking the winner, let him take notice that William Muldoon, the Grand Old Man of the New York Athletic Commission, has recorded his judgment that Stribling is the best man now in sight.

The title of Champion of the World for which Schmeling and Stribling are going to fight has been pretty badly battered and bent, but it is the title just the same. The New York Commission awarded it to Schmeling because Sharkey—who had by far the better of the contest up to that moment—had knocked him out with a foul blow below the belt. But they made one condition—that Schmeling must give Sharkey a return match at an early day and let him have his chance to show what he could do in a fair fight. Max agreed to this with loud cries of joy, but dodged the match when he came back to America. Thereupon the New York Commission solemnly and officially took the title away from him.

MAX retorted that he wouldn't fight in New York anyhow; that no one could take his title from him except with the fists, and he went out West. The National Boxing Association officially proclaimed Max Schmeling Champion of the World, with Stribling as foremost contender and Jack Sharkey second.

The wise, deep, cunning and hard-boiled critics are whispering about this match—just as they have whispered from the earliest days—that the fight is "in the bag," and that it is all fixed for one man to win. That talk is piffle. Mistakes have been made in refereeing fights, just as mistakes have been made in governing countries and in all other human affairs, but the big battles for years have been honestly fought and refereed and the best man has won.

And there is one fact that the hardest-boiled cannot get past: the value of the championship is so great that no crook or group of crooks can afford to pay a man to throw it—and, if they could afford the money, neither party to the crooked bargain would trust the other for a moment. The thing simply could not work.

The greatest peril that Stribling has

to face is his tendency to tighten up and grow overcautious if he thinks there is any danger of losing the victory, thus holding himself back from doing his best. The biggest obstacle ahead of Schmeling is his lack of the fine edge that comes of constant battling.

The one great principle that he seems to have overlooked is that a fighting man who does not fight is constantly slipping back in power, in judgment of timing and distance, in all that balance of nerve and muscle that enables a man to do his best in the ring. He seems not to know that battle practice is the best preparation for battle, and that no amount of calisthenics can take its place.

Imagine a champion billiard player not playing a match for a year, simply relying on long walks, a little gymnastics and exercise on a wrist machine to keep him in trim to defend his title. His health might be robust, his wrist like steel—but what about his touch with the cue? What about his familiarity with the ups and downs of a match and the habit of keeping cool under fire that come only from constant experience?

So many of us look on a boxer only as a swift, strong man that we forget the most important part of his art, the habit of instantly adapting himself to every move of the antagonist, of sensing that there will be an opening and shooting his punch into it almost before it happens, of feinting the enemy into such a position that he can hit him all unprotected and coming into the blow.

This art never grows to perfection in the gymnasium, or in punching the bag, or in set-tos with sparring partners whose job it is to get hit and tell the world how good the champ is. And yet Schmeling, who is a mere novice in the business compared with Stribling or Sharkey, has not had a real fight since he was put out by Sharkey's foul last year.

What happened to Jim Corbett in two of his greatest battles illustrates the point. For more than three years before he met Fitzsimmons at Carson City, Corbett had not defended his title in the ring. He made a good living on the stage, and meanwhile he did plenty of road work every day and enough gymnastics and bag punching to keep fit.

For six weeks before meeting Fitz, he wore out a flock of sparring partners every day, in the ring and running the roads. But no one really fought him, and he had worn out his vitality with too much road work.

Corbett followed a very different program in preparation for the Jeffries match. He took a cottage at Lakewood and played out of doors twelve hours a day, building up stamina and having lots of fun—not training. But during the last four weeks before the big bout he fought Gus Ruhlin for a full hour four times a week. No one saw the fights but Bill Madden, Ruhlin's manager, who was timekeeper and referee. Bill has told me that those fights were real fights, and that he called time only when one of the men was partly dazed by a blow. The result was that in the big match Corbett came within an ace of getting the decision over Jeffries, who had won the title from Fitz.

But you will notice that even Corbett, the most intelligent champion we have ever had, with the possible exception of Tunney, did not follow the best system of training until after he had lost his title by taking life too easy and omitting battle practice.

It is probably too much to expect that Schmeling, even though he is unusually intelligent, will learn how to take the best care of himself until after he shall be knocked out. And, at that, he may come through his match with Stribling with the crown still on his head. But I hae ma doots.

William Hemmingway is a frequent contributor to this magazine.

Mr. Brannigan Sees Red

By STEWART ROBERTSON

The Eyes of Mr. Brannigan, Crook de Luxe, Rest Slyly on a Box of Glowing Rubies.

AMIDST the press of traffic that streamed south on Lafayette Street a certain limousine stood out from his neighbors, so glossy, so particularly well-burnished, that it was obviously either a millionaire's car or a rented one. The latter surmise would have proved to be correct, and it matched the manner of the debonair figure that lounged in the rear seat, yawning boredly to hide the perturbation that eddied beneath his beige waistcoat.

A few blocks from Brooklyn Bridge the car swerved to the left and rolled to a silent and dignified halt in front of police headquarters, whereupon its occupant alighted, giving the denizens of Center Street an opportunity to gape at the glass of fashion. To all appearances the conservative worsted suit, lavender-spatted patent leathers, and precise derby said Park Avenue, and if any onlooker nursed a doubt it was soon dispelled by the expert handling of a gleaming monocle.

Up the steps sauntered the figure in the manner of a prince about to patronize the peasants, rested gray suède-gloved fingers upon a revolving door and passed nonchalantly through the lobby and into an elevator. A mo-

ment later he was in a circular reception room, staring haughtily at a ruddy young policeman at the information desk.

"Mr. Chawles Brannigan to see the first deputy commissioner," he announced. "I believe that I have some sort of appointment with him at this hour, so hurry along about it, like a good chap."

"Sure, you've got a date with him," said the clerk, eying the visitor with unwilling admiration. "By request, too, Mr. Brannigan. If you don't mind following me I'll see that you're not held up. Right in here, please."

The well-tailored gentleman entered a sparsely furnished room and gazed disapprovingly at a bulky, cigar-smoking person in a swivel chair. "You wanted to see me?" he inquired, registering just the correct amount of patrician annoyance.

"Hello, One-eye," boomed the first deputy, his amused glance taking in the ensemble before coming to rest on the monocle. "Take a chair, kid, and——"

"The name is Chawles Brannigan," corrected the other.

"So it is. And the business is ribbing suckers. Am I right?"

"I live on my money," said Mr. Brannigan, seating himself and giving the monocle a languid polish. "What the devil do you mean by getting so familiar?"

"Because I don't care for your source of supply," snapped the first deputy. "Come out of your trance, One-eye, and pay attention to me! There's been some fancy confidence work going on in your neighborhood, and although the rich boobs won't squeal for fear they'd be laughed at, enough gossip has trickled through to make us suspicious. Sooner or later we'll send you up the river for a strange interlude at the big house, but just now you're going to travel anyway. Do I make myself clear?"

Mr. Brannigan had grown tense and wary during this recital, and now his eyes met the first deputy's with complete understanding. "You took the words right out of my mouth," he declared. "How did you know I was contemplating a Western trip? Why, commissioner, you're positively psychic!"

"Keep that high polish front for them that likes it. Contemplating me ankle! You're trying to take the play away from me, One-eye, but it doesn't go over. I'm running you out of town, savvy?"

"Don't be vulgar," smiled the confidence man, rearranging the gardenia in his buttonhole, "but if you must be that way, why bellow about it? Very bad for the blood pressure and the mentality, old chap, so please be careful. However, perhaps your a case of save the surface and you save all."

"Listen, smart guy," said the policeman curiously, "why don't you reform before it's too late? I remember hearing about a mid-continent con man called Tulsa McCarthy who got a lot of publicity by renouncing sin because he discovered an honest racket that paid dividends. Of course, he was an old-timer, but I notice that your own reflexes are getting a bit tardy."

"He's nothing but a name to me, commissioner, like all those Western operatives. He may have been dynamite out in the jungles, but that reform stuff shows what his caliber really was. A small timer, that's all, old or young. Tulsa McCarthy! You've got a nerve classing me—well, aside from that, how is your Aunt Emma?"

"Take it on the lam!"

"If by that you mean the Lake Shore Limited," said Mr. Brannigan urbanely, "your mind runs willingly along with mine. You're really marvelous, commissioner, and I won't forget to send you a postal card."

"There'll be a man tailing you as far as Yonkers," growled the first deputy,

"so don't get overcome with sentiment and try to leave the train at One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street. Go West, One-eye, and as far as you like. Lots of luck—and all of it *hard*."

SIX P. M. found a tweed-clad Mr. Brannigan being carried smoothly along the banks of the Hudson, appraising his fellow passengers from behind his little glass disk, and gradually becoming reconciled to his enforced journey. A prowl through the cars failed to turn up any fertile soil, but the call for dinner brought him opposite one of those peculiar combinations of candor and imbecility that roams the land on extra-fare trains. After revealing almost everything concerning himself save his laundry mark, the stranger launched into praise of Chicago.

"There's a town for you!" he enthused. "To read the newspapers you'd think it was full of crooks, and maybe we do have a few, but what's the reason? Because we're wealthy, that's why. Money on every side, you might say."

"I'll let you say," said "One-eye" politely, it being his policy to encourage the windy type in the hope of getting some usable information. "I never heard of crooks flocking around a corpse, and certainly Chicago is far from that. Look at the millionaires: McCormick, Armour, Insull, and——"

"Not only them," burbled his vis-à-vis, dismissing the prominent families with a reckless gesture. "Look at this Tockwotton bird—Ira Tockwotton, the overnight oil king. He breezed in from Oklahoma and settled down on Lake Shore Drive with more style than an Indian rajah. He's green, of course, but he knew enough to pick Chi instead of New York."

Mr. Brannigan sighed happily and bent a fatherly gaze on the young man. "Tell me about him," he urged, feeling the glimmerings of an idea. "There's something intriguing about a man who has made a fortune like that. I suppose it's the very crudity of the thing that appeals to me." He flirted the monocle as though to indicate that the knowledge would be in the line of mental slumming. "Green, you say?"

"Well, his wife and daughter are rather inclined to make a splurge, and he hasn't the heart to deny them anything after hiding among the sagebrush for so long. The storekeepers know it, too, and they knock their foreheads on the counter at the mere mention of his name."

"Good taste," murmured One-eye, smiling dreamily into the future, "is not acquired overnight, but they will learn. Perhaps you and I, who know instinctively what is correct, may serve as models for these Tockwottons—quite unwittingly, you know. A contact with you—or myself—and they may never forget it."

"Say, you're an interesting fellow," beamed the Chicagoan. "Going to be in town very long?"

"Not more than twenty-four hours, if my plans work out. Much too busy for any social activities," said Mr. Brannigan cagily, "but it has been stimulating to meet you. May I hear some more?"

By the time he hustled through the grimy La Salle Street station One-eye's slightly oblique intellect was functioning with an ease that surprised him. It must be the infectious Western spirit, he reflected, else why should he feel disinclined to loaf luxuriously on the proceeds of his last Park Avenue delving? Ordinarily, when flush, he preferred to gorge himself like a boa constrictor, but now, with something green and tempting from Oklahoma waving on the horizon, he became a man of action.

Registering at the Blackstone, he enjoyed a savory dinner, did little posturing in the lobby, and then sauntered down Michigan Boulevard until he came opposite the windows of a jewelry store that reeked of distinction.

"So this is the famous Galatoire's, eh?" said Mr. Brannigan gayly, inspecting the neat gilt letters embedded in the stonework. "And staffed by a bunch of snobs, too, or I'm a monkey's uncle. Dust off your high-and-mighty manner, Chawlie me boy, you'll need it in the morning."

He carried on as far as the Tribune Tower, and then, figuring that he had dispensed enough sunshine into darkened lives, he boarded a taxi and asked to be driven past the Tockwotton home.

That sprawling imitation of a Normandy château nestling behind its wrought-iron gates, looked like a cross between a museum and a funeral home. Mr. Brannigan grinned as he pictured the field day the servants must be having under their inept master.

"It cost four million bucks," confided the taxi driver. "The doorknobs is gold, see, and in the bathrooms what does the water come outa but flamingoes' beaks. Gee, even the butler is class; I got a peek at him one day when the door was open and he could put the freeze on the Astors and have enough left over for a quart of sherbet. There's platinum cupids on——"

"My good man," said One-eye severely, "I'm from New York, and therefore not at all impressed by your statistics. Second rate, I assure you, the same as your overadvertised criminals, for what are they but a lot of muscle men and laughably crude in their methods? Does it take intelligence to slug a person? No. But has any Chicago master mind tried to gyp this Oklahoma prize package, I awsk you?"

"You mean our boys ain't got brains like the Noo York sharpshooters?"

"Exactly," said the confidence man, whose own gray matter was in a state of ferment. "And now, I would be interested to see how long it would take you to drive me over to the Union Station."

THE journey absorbed twelve minutes, and after being advised to allow an extra five during the daytime, Mr. Brannigan left the driver goggling at a five-dollar tip, and barged into the depot. A few moments later he was crammed into a telephone booth and conversing with Mr. Ira Tockwotton.

"This is Powellton Post, of San Francisco," he fluted, using a favorite alias. "The Posts, you know, which I suppose is sufficient introduction—what?"

"Sure is, Mr. Post," came a friendly drawl. "Can't remember just what your line is, but you'll pardon that, maybe. The Posts—hm-m-m! I guess everybody knows them. Sure. What can I do for you?"

"I want to see you to-morrow afternoon regarding a new pipeline route," said One-eye, smirking at the latent snobbery. "What time would be convenient?"

"Have lunch at the club, and we'll talk it over," invited the hospitable Tockwotton.

"Sorry, old chap, but my secretary has allotted most of my day. What about three thirty?"

"That'll do me, Mr. Post. I guess you won't have any trouble finding that new forty-story tower of ours, so I'll be expecting you."

Mr. Brannigan allowed his voice to take on the quality of crispness. "I can absolutely depend upon your being there?" he queried. "My time is——"

"I never leave the office before half past four," the oil man assured him. "Never. I didn't get rich by playing hooky, Mr. Post, so don't worry about finding me in."

"Splendid," said One-eye, and meant it sincerely. "By the way, how are your wife and daughter, and have they any engagements for to-morrow?"

A gasp of gratification came over the wire. "T-they're just fine," stuttered the Oklahoman, "and they'll be tickled

to know you called. Y-yes, they're going to some concert or other; one of those things you simply must be seen at. My girl's having a birthday this week, and they're being extra busy."

Mr. Brannigan became conscious of an ecstatic glow. This was more, far more, than he had dared to hope for, and he decided to give a fillip to the deal, to deviate from the usual routine.

"My kindest regards," he said daringly. "I suppose that means you're in the market for jewelry, eh? Rubies are quite the thing now, you know. Just got my wife another last month."

"I don't know," Tockwotton told him frankly. "Emeralds kind of catch my eye, but——"

"You'll pardon me, old chap, but they're out of the question. The mob's wearing emeralds, but rubies——Well, I've got to pop into Galatoire's tomorrow, and I'd be delighted to choose a few for them to send out to you. You'll have to see the Post collection some day when you're on the coast, you know."

"G-gosh, I hate to trouble you, but the way I feel is that nothing's too good for the girl and if——"

"The trouble would be a pleasure," chuckled Mr. Brannigan. "Well, say no more about it; I'll see you at three thirty, on the dot. Good-by."

He tottered out of the booth and over to a ticket window, where he purchased transportation and a parlor car chair on the three twenty train to Milwaukee for the next afternoon. Then, recalling the millionaire's anxiety to please, he indulged in a spell of mild hysteria.

"Soft as a bag of marshmallows," he told himself. "The old boy safely anchored downtown all afternoon, and the dames already dated up, which saves me the trouble of calling them out on a wild-goose chase. V-e-r-y nice, but a trifle too easy to spur the old artistic sensibilities. Still, another deft little episode will do me no harm. 'Glad you called, Mr. Post,' says Tockwotton, and —ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

"Feeling pretty good, sir?" inquired a roving policeman, saluting the aristocratic figure.

"You guessed rightly, officer," gasped Mr. Brannigan, as he salvaged the remnant of his dignity, "but it's absolutely nothing to what I'll be feeling to-morrow!"

A MORNING stroll in the sunshine has been known to bring on the trivial form of insanity of talking to oneself, and Mr. Brannigan was enjoying that vice as he ambled toward Galatoire's.

"I'm glad he agreed to rubies," he said happily, "for if there's anything I like to gaze at it's that pigeon-blood red glowing like mahogany embers. The color impregnates your very eyeballs until you're almost hypnotized by it—anyhow, it's always got me. Ah, here we are at the mines, Chawlie me boy, so carry on. Rubies it is."

He entered Galatoire's with a most commendable swagger, strikingly different from the manner in which most customers crept into the sacred precincts. This alone, Mr. Brannigan knew from experience, would give him prestige in the eyes of the trade, and, refusing to be impressed by his surroundings, he wandered to a counter and inquired offhandedly:

"Got any rubies?"

"Most certainly, sir," said the salesman stiffly. "Which do you wish to see; rings, eardrops, or brooches?"

"Trot 'em all out," ordered One-eye, staring glassily, "and I'll make up my mind at leisure. Don't forget a lavalliere or two, either, like a good chaap, and remember, none of that Siamese rubbish. I want nothing but the best stones from Mogok."

Another look at the monocle and the salesman became plastic. One by one he reverently marshaled a collection of

pieces upon a square of white velvet and Mr. Brannigan hovered greedily above them, drinking in their deep, rich color until he felt drugged with beauty.

"Marvelous!" he breathed. "But none too good for a Tockwotton, what?"

"Tuckwotton, sir?"—with a joyful inflection.

"Yes, of course," said the confidence man, once more firmly in character. "Ira doesn't know much about rubies—you can understand that, of course—so he asked me to make a selection for him. His daughter's having a birthday, you know."

The jeweler expressed the fervent hope that Miss Tockwotton would have many more and never forget to count them.

"This ring," said Mr. Brannigan after a lengthy period of rapture, pointing to a vermillion blob of light, "lay it aside, and let me see—hm-m-m!—the pear-shaped pendant and that circular brooch. V-e-r-y nice. Now, then, Ira cannot go wrong, no matter which he chooses, and between ourselves, I shouldn't be at all surprised if he took the lot."

"You certainly know rubies, sir."

"I trust so," said One-eye, a shade wistfully. "I'm tremendously fond of gazing at red. The color of the East, of tiger blood, of adventure! No doubt you've heard of my collection in San Francisco. You will have these delivered to Mr. Tockwotton's home promptly at two o'clock, no sooner, because we wish to make sure that his daughter has left the house, you understand." The smile of Galatoire's minion indicated that he took extreme pleasure in being included in the family secret. "I see that you will," patronized the confidence man, "for you bear the stamp of a most efficient salesman." He waited tensely for the action that should have been forthcoming at this moment, and he was not disappointed.

"Thank you, sir," bowed the clerk. "The delivery will be made on time, and if there is anything I can do for you personally in the future, why, perhaps this will be a reminder, sir." He searched in his pocket and handed over an engraved card.

GALATOIRE & COMPANY

Jewelers

Michigan Boulevard at Adams Street

MONTAGUE B. STEVENS

"Right-o, Mr. Stevens," nodded One-eye, glancing carelessly at the card, then stuffing it into a vest pocket. "Some time, perhaps, when the market is easier."

THE salesman watched him vanish into the noon-hour parade, sighed envious homage to Mr. Brannigan's tailor, and then, with commendable caution, got in touch with Mr. Ira Tockwotton.

"Powellton Post?" echoed the oil man. "Why, yes, one of the Posts, of San Francisco. Old family, you know. Certainly I know him."

"Thank you, sir. I simply wanted to be sure before the rubies were delivered."

There was a long silence. Then, "Quite so," said Tockwotton slowly. "Mr. Post picked out some rubies for me to look at, eh? I was just thinking about that very thing. Clever fellow, Post, in his way."

"Yes, sir, he seemed to be. Knows all about rubies."

"I would have preferred emeralds, but I can't remember whether we agreed on any exact time for delivery. What did he tell you?"

"Two o'clock sharp, sir."

"Oh, yes, at the office."

"No, sir, at your residence."

"Now, that certainly was thoughtful of him!" cried the oil man heartily. "He knows how my time is divided up. Well, just shoot them along and everything

will be splendid. You'll hear from me later."

In the meantime the insouciant One-eye spent a couple of hours shopping and lunching, checked out of the Blackstone and left his bags at the Union Station parcel office. Shortly before two he was parked in a taxi near the Tockwotton mansion, and nodded approval as Galatoire's mulberry-colored delivery car stopped in front of it. There was a glimpse of a baronial butler signing for the package, then the grillework swung to, and Mr. Brannigan departed on a leisurely ride to Evanston.

Half an hour later he dismissed the cab at the North Shore Hotel, chose a secluded telephone booth and called the oil man's residence. Starchy, overbred tones answered him.

"Mr. Tockwotton's butler speaking."

"This is Galatoire & Co.," quavered the confidence man, his voice shaking artistically. "We sent up a package for Mr. Tockwotton a little while ago, but we regret to say that a mistake has been made. The wrong package was delivered; we—we cannot imagine how it occurred, frightfully sorry and all that, but will you kindly hand it to a special messenger we are rushing there immediately. The proper package will follow as soon as we can trace it. You understand? Our messenger, Mr. Stevens, will identify himself, so make sure you give it to the right party."

There was a quick inhalation of breath in conjunction with a series of clicking noises, and Mr. Brannigan grinned as he visualized the pompous butler taking umbrage. A moment of shocked silence, then:

"I am not in the habit of making mistakes," said the ridiculously theatrical voice. "Your Mr. Stevens has only to see me and the matter will be attended to."

"Er—we would appreciate it in a financial way if you fail to mention this matter to your employer."

"Mr. Tockwotton is at his office for the day," said the butler, and the listener would have sworn that he was smirking, "and besides, I am a man of discretion, as your Mr. Stevens will soon find out."

"He is on his way already," said One-eye before dashing from the booth, but once outside his lackadaisical air vanished, and he proceeded with the deadly certainty of an eagle swooping for the kill. Then he halted, irresolute. Nothing should be left to chance, for one never knew about these millionaires. He reëntered the booth and called the Tockwotton offices.

"Yes, Mr. Post," cooed a secretary. "I know Mr. Tockwotton will speak to you. He was rather expecting you to call."

The astounded Mr. Brannigan bumped his nose against the mouthpiece. "In-indeed," he stammered. There was a slight wait with sundry mysterious buzzings, then the Oklahoman drawl greeted him.

"Checking up on me, eh?" it laughed. "I suppose you've read somewhere that I'm eccentric. Well, I don't blame you, Mr. Post, for your time is pretty valuable just now, I imagine."

"Extremely so," said One-eye relievedly. "Yes, I wanted to make sure that nothing had called you away from the office. Sorry to have bothered you."

A SHORT sprint to the street, and another taxi carried him into town while he carefully removed the monocle and hat, rumpling his hair so that the likeness of a bareheaded, harassed clerk in peril of losing his job would run madly up the Tockwotton steps. As the taxi slithered around the graveled driveway he glanced at his watch. Five minutes to three.

Violent ringing of the bell aroused no speed within, but after the decorous wait approved by society, the door was opened by a stagily wooden butler. His

penthouse eyebrows sprang upward in lieu of questioning at the sight before him.

"I'm from Galatoire's," wheezed Mr. Brannigan, his starting eyes and twisted countenance bearing little resemblance to his usually impeccable self. "I—I—you've got that package?"

"You are Mr. Stevens, sir?"

"Here's my card," panted One-eye, producing the oblong of pasteboard. "Keep it if you like, but hurry, if you please."

The butler read it, then proceeded to radiate that assurance possible only to large and imposing bodies. "Don't worry any longer, sir," he counseled. "I have it safely for you." He stepped into the hall for a moment, and returned carrying a small box wrapped in the distinctive Galatoire lavender paper with a crested, unbroken seal uppermost.

Mr. Brannigan exhibited a relief that was far from being entirely counterfeit as his hands closed upon the loot. It must be three o'clock now. "Th-thank you he muttered. "Not a word about this, like a good chap." The butler smiled grandly, then admiringly, as a twenty-dollar bill crackled in his palm, and he bowed respectfully as the taxi whirled out of sight.

Union Station was reached in less than the prescribed seventeen minutes, and the now rejuvenated One-eye followed his luggage aboard the Milwaukee express with two minutes to spare. Soft was no name for it! Before Galatoire's and old Tockwotton had ceased recriminations and decided upon action, he would be driving toward the Pacific coast, ostensibly just another dusty, disillusioned tourist. He'd buy a second-hand car in Milwaukee, and then the disposing of the rubies, much as he hated to do it. No need to hurry, for he had plenty of money, but the prospect intrigued him.

He drew out the package and regarded it fondly. The ring could be pawned for sixty per cent over the border at Agua Caliente, where the casino and race track made it possible to unload anything without being questioned very closely. The other stones, removed from their settings, would find their way back into the market by devious routes. All in all it had been a playful little interlude in the drab business of life, and he chuckled as he remembered the first deputy's warning.

"Reform!" he scoffed, settling deep in his green plush chair. "Not while I've got this set of brains, commissioner, my old tomato! And I'm artistic in the bargain. Believe it or not, it breaks me all up to part with this translucent loveliness." His fingers drummed on the impressive waxen seal of the deluded Galatoire's, then they ripped off the paper and lifted a corner of the box. Inside lay three white leather cases; the one on the left would be the pendant, spun as delicately as a golden web. He leaned forward to do a little private gloating.

The roar of the train seemed to grow louder, thought Mr. Brannigan, or was it the blood pounding in his ears as he gazed at the empty case. And the second—and the third! Had Galatoire's crossed him? They had. A torn piece of note paper bearing Tockwotten's synthetic coat-of-arms caught his eye, and he snatched at it viciously, reading the message that sent a flush to his hitherto complacent face:

I recognized the racket because I used to work it in emeralds before I reformed (the scrawl advised him). A little advice. When you spoke to me this afternoon I was at home, not the office. You forgot that my switchboard operator could transfer the call, so perhaps you're slipping. Drop in on me when you're in town again, and I'll tell you some easier ones. Compliments of Ira Tockwotton, alias Tulsa McCarthy.

P. S.: You can lift off seals with a hot knife. Try it some time.

P. P. S.: Do you think I make a good butler?

P. P. S.: And, by the way, if you think

you can blackmail me to get even—try that some time, too!

"The dirty, double-crossing dummy!" raged the victim, as the uninspiring Illinois landscape turned to a blur before his eyes. "I ought to go back and slam—I—ahhhhh, the crook! It wouldn't have been so bad to get hijacked, but *this* way!" His veneer of nonchalance was gone. All the generations of quarrelsome ancestors were clamoring for vengeance, all his carefully hidden water-front background was urging him on to a battle he knew he would never dare to wage, and as Mr. Brannigan responded to the call of, "Ticket, please!" he was seeing, though not by request, a most deep and bloodthirsty shade of red.

MORE RADIUM

THE largest deposit of radium in the world has been located at Great Bear Lake, Alberta, Canada. It is not known as yet whether it can be produced, however, inexpensively enough to compete with the Belgian Congo radium.

This find seems strangely in key with the newest activities of the modern world—air travel, radio, television, radium. We are living in the future predicted by imaginative writers like Jules Verne. If radium could be brought out like gold, thousands would hurry northward in a stampede comparable to the famous gold rush. But what a different scene there would be! Old-timers would gasp. Keen-eyed young miners in leather flying jackets and helmets would step out of planes that glided onto the snow on skis. News services would be in touch with the outside world by telegraph. News-reel men would set up their cameras, and sound apparatus would record the hubbub. Radios would entertain the tired wealth seekers in their cabins at night, and the more enterprising of them would be experimenting with television reception!

WHAT THE UNEMPLOYED READ

A PERIOD like the present one of unemployment brings about many unusual conditions. One of these, for example, is to be found in the New York Public Library's annual report, in which it is pointed out that extra heavy demands have been made upon the library throughout the last twelve months, and that the demands are traceable to unemployment.

Men and women out of work, it is claimed, are reading up on new lines of work, like radio, aviation, and similar occupations which heretofore have attracted comparatively small numbers of people. These readers search intensely through the trade journals, studying new lines, sizing up conditions in work radically different from that to which they have been accustomed.

Some of them pore desperately over these books and periodicals, seizing at straws, wisps of hope. Others are using their spare time deliberately in an effort to prepare themselves, improve themselves to a point where their services will be in demand.

Last year there were calls for six hundred thirty-eight thousand eight hundred and thirty-four more books than there were during the previous year. The number of readers increased also—three hundred twenty-four thousand and forty more than in 1929.

Besides occupational and technical reading matter, a large number of readers showed great interest in volumes about Russia, in the Einstein relativity theory, and in sociology.

Turning Hobo, a Reporter Shoulders His Way into Crookdom's No Man's Land.

We Accept That Challenge!

By LEONARD LUPTON

A FLASH came into the *Herald* office at eleven two of the finest spring morning of the year. The body of Jimmy Davis of the *Herald* staff had been found ripped by shotgun slugs in a scrub lot between the West Shore Railroad and the waters of the river which slapped upon the shore of the little Hudson Valley town.

At eleven two Franklyn P. Ralston was on the story. At eleven eight he was at the scene of the crime. At eleven thirty the press association wire out of the *Herald* office was hot with all available details of the moment.

The *Herald* went to press at twelve noon, one hour in advance of schedule. They killed a building-boom story, ran an eight-column streamer, and on the editorial page there appeared the following:

The ruthless murder of James Davis of the *Herald* staff has shocked the entire community. Davis, an ace investigator and one of the shrewdest reporters in this office, had occasion to make many enemies during this newspaper's relentless campaign against the gangster element of our city.

That Davis was slain in the line of duty is known beyond doubt. Which element of local gangland is responsible for his untimely demise remains as yet a matter of conjecture. The sheriff's office, the local police, and investigators from this newspaper are now working on that angle of the case. Every effort possible to mankind will be brought to bear in an effort to see that justice is meted out to the proper person.

James Davis was rated one of the finest newspapermen in the business. A man of sterling integrity, unquestionable character, and modest mien, he was well loved by every right-thinking person with whom he came in contact.

His murder is a blow to the city at large; it is a personal tragedy brought home with stinging force to every member of the *Herald* staff. We see, in his tragic death, a threat to the peace and safety of this community. We see, in his cold-blooded assassination, a danger which menaces every active, outspoken champion of the right.

There have been other gang murders in the past; it is expected that more will occur. But when gangdom raises its mailed fist and strikes at the voice of the people—the press—then has the warfare come out into the open. A challenge been flung into the teeth of a long-suffering public.

It is with a fierce pride that our answer goes back to gangdom:

"We accept that challenge!"

Jimmy Davis had indeed been the ace of the *Herald* staff. He was the modern equivalent of the old-time star reporter up until that date when gang depredations in town broke forth with a terrible fury. On that date he became that something of which every cub dreams—a sort of supernewspaperman. His loss would be difficult to replace. But the very fact that Franklyn P. Ralston had been assigned to the ruthless murder case gave every member of the staff a faint idea of which way the wind blew. And to a man they were happy in Ralston's opportunity. The man assigned to the story was the logical successor to the murdered ace. At least, he was given the chance to win his spurs.

Franklyn P. Ralston would occasion a second look on the street. Women, more frequently than men, were susceptible to that desire which he created for a second glance. He was tall, and fittingly broad-shouldered. His black hair was trim and short. His eyes, singularly calm and unemotional, looked unflinchingly upon the world. His mouth was a wide, generous, humorous gash. His chin reminded one of granite.

Beyond these facial characteristics, he had nothing special to recommend him. He was just an ordinary sort of a person. But one thing he did have, at the moment; a tremendous grief, and somewhere down inside him a slow-burning and terrible rage.

Franklyn P. Ralston was of early Yankee descent. His grandfathers and his great-grandfathers had fought to get this country on an even keel and keep it there. Naturally it rankled that in this town which had once been a happy, prosperous community, outside gunmen and gangsters were carrying on their unnatural business. The murder of Jimmy Davis capped the climax. Franklyn P. Ralston was on the warpath. He didn't advertise the fact. He didn't even look much different than usual. His mouth was drawn into a straight, harsh line. His eyes were brilliant with internal flame. His jaw was set at a trifle harder angle. But otherwise he was the same man—to all appearances, that is. Inside, Franklyn P. Ralston was like unto a wild man. He had taken the assignment, rushed to the scene of the crime, attended to the routine details which are a prelude to any news story, and which, on a murder case, help mark time until the coroner arrives. With these done, he looked down at Jimmy Davis; looked long and earnestly. His face was very white when he turned away, but as he spoke over the phone, his voice was calm, and he said his say efficiently. His job, as far as reporting was concerned, might now be considered quits. He had only the follow up to concern him. And for that, he went home and got his gun.

THERE was an editorial conference that afternoon. This was followed by an interview at police headquarters.

"To whom," said Franklyn P. Ralston without emotion, "do you attribute the outrage?"

"You know better than to ask me. Who am I to guess in the dark, Frank?"

"I know, chief, but that's one of the stock questions. It never is answered. Now, confidentially and not for publication—what's your guess? Where do we start in?"

The chief might have done any one of a number of things. He might have raised his hands in the air and cried "Arrah!" which was a favorite gesture and a favorite remark. But what the chief really did do, was to bite down hard on his cigar, look Frank Ralston in the eye and say, "Son, you know as well as I who Jimmy was after. He come so close to having the goods on 'em in that Barco stabbing case that if I was them and think like they do, the swine——"

"I get you," said Franklyn P. Ralston. "Jimmy knew a lot. It's not on paper, chief. It went with him."

The chief coughed behind his cigar.

"I know," he said, "I know. And loose talk don't get us anywhere. But I'll have a talk with Capristi and after that——"

Ralston said softly, "How about Solly McGuire?"

"I've got his report," said the chief. "It wasn't such a hot idea—letting him fake a discharge from the force and take up wit' the bunch of them. He ain't gettin' nowhere with all of his sleuthin'. No hope in that direction, lad."

"But he's a smart detective. He must have learned something since he's been associating with——"

The chief shook his head.

"Frank," he said, "smart sleuthing don't come into this game. In the old days we could get the bullet. We could sometimes get the gun. We could get an expert to tell us if said gun fired said bullet. We could pin it down on the right man, and take it to court and make a nice shut-and-closed first-degree murder charge out of it; but now—how in the hell can a man trace shotgun slugs? How can he give the D. A. anything at all to work with? And if by some dumb luck he does get his man, ain't there a smart shyster right there to work the insanity plea as a last resort? Why Frank, I'm telling you, they used to try to reach a judge in the old days; now they threaten the jury. A business man with a family ain't takin' chances. Not him. Frank, there's only one way to get these modern bums and that's to get 'em at their own game."

"Every man to his own game, chief," said Franklyn dryly. "I don't know their game; wouldn't know how to go about playing it."

"As a newspaperman you should know. As the ace of the staff you've got to know. What follows next, in your own game?"

"The usual thing would be to reshape all known details into a second-day story. Some of the boys call it the 'follow up.' That's about all there is to one of these gang shootings. If it happens to be a big shot who has been put on the spot, why maybe we'd run a picture of the six carloads of flowers."

The chief was drumming on the table.

"Frank," he said, "you were pretty close to Jimmy Davis. He was hot on somebody's tail when they got him. What was he doing down at the water front?"

Frank shrugged.

"I haven't figured it out. He might have been lured there on a hot tip. They may have faked something."

"That's so. But there's something else to consider: the river is a great highway of transportation. There's an old dock on the edge of that scrub lot. The piles are rotting and the planking's gone, and nobody ever goes near except the kids who swim there. But wait—there's a shack there, too. We ran a bunch of 'bos out of there two years past. Who is using that shack now?"

"Why, no one," said Frank.

The chief said, "Come with me, Frank. I remember that I saw something there this afternoon. We can see it from the corner."

They walked out into the warm spring sunlight. Frank's face was grim and tense. His pulse was beginning to quicken. Had the chief seen something of importance?

They reached the corner, and stood looking down the paved street toward the scrub lot at the water's edge; looking toward the great, barren field, and the rotting piles of the old dock, and the little shack which was perched on the pier.

"What do you think of that?" asked the chief.

"There's smoke coming from that haphazard, rickety old chimney," admitted Ralston.

"So there is," said the chief, "so there is! Well, that's what I had in mind, lad. I'd give a heap to know who was living in that shack—and why. It seems to me that we should know all about it. Now, if I was to go down there the brass buttons would scare the daylights out of him. We'd have to put the sweat on him, and he might not stand it. Stubborn, some of them birds. But if another bum was to drop in on him, casual like——"

"I'm no actor," said Franklyn P. Ralston, "but I've got some clothes that are too far gone to give away. I'll dig 'em up."

"Now," said the chief, "that's talking!"

"And what's more," said Ralston slowly, "I'll go down to the water tower. I know one of the railroad cops. He's generally down that way when the late freight comes through. She hits here a little before five. I know, because more than once I've come up on the five o'clock local and we've been held back waiting for that freight to clear. They don't put it in the hole to let the passenger through, because this is the local's last stop. I'll hop that freight down by the water tower. It's upgrade all the way, and she won't be rolling fast. I'll drop off, opposite that shack; and, if anybody's watching, I'll have come in on the freight, and no mistake."

"You've got an idea," the chief admitted. He looked at his watch. "Leg it home and hop into the old clothes. You'll have just about time to make it!"

MIZNER, the railroad detective, came along the string of box cars. He paused at one of the couplings midway down the train and let out a roar.

"Out of there, you!" he cried. Mizner was a big man. He reached up a pudgy fist and dragged a poorly-dressed figure down to the grit of the roadbed. He began to rough him. The man struggled, and as Mizner whirled him around the man's cap flew off.

"Well!" Mizner let out a roar that could be heard back in the caboose. "How long since you've been hopping the cars? What in the name of——"

Franklyn P. Ralston, no longer the trim reporter from the office of the *Herald,* grinned up into Mizner's fat, bewildered face.

"Easy on the rough stuff, Jack," he said. "You got any objections to my stealing a ride up to the scrub lot?"

Mizner was a keen one.

"What's the low-down on that murder this morning?" he wanted to know.

"I wished I could tell you, Jack."

"A white man if there ever was one—Jimmy Davis. But why this rig?" He grinned suddenly. "There's some connection? You on that case?"

"I'm calling on a 'bo who seems to have taken over that shack on the abandoned dock. I figured you'd let me ride that far and then drop off—make a better impression on the fellow when I drop in."

Mizner's grin broadened.

"Come back to the caboose with me," he said. He led the way.

"Tommy," said Mizner, to the brakeman standing by the last car, "this is a very personal friend of mine. He's going to be riding that gondola up ahead. Soon as you get under way again, start forward, will you, and kick him off your train just as you're passing the old dock south of the station?"

Tommy looked bewildered.

"Your friend—kick him off?"

"And then forget all about it," warned Mizner. "You knew Jimmy Davis? White guy, wasn't he? Well, this is a pal of his. You may be doing a whole lot toward helping him solve a mystery."

Tommy nodded.

"I'll do it," he said; then added, "I'll make it so realistic that it'll hurt. If anybody's watching they'll think this guy came a long ways and figured to go a long ways farther."

"O. K.," said Mizner. He showed Frank to the gondola. "Remember," he said in parting, "to land running; may save you a scraped face."

The freight got under way. With much chuffing up forward and much rattling of drawbars aft the long, sinuous line of cars rolled up the grade toward the station. A brakeman might be seen moving along the top of the swaying line. He dropped down the ladder, swung into the gondola, and just as they passed the old dock, the brakeman boosted Frank to the top of the car side and very expertly booted him off the moving train.

Frank landed running, and then went heels over head down the gritty embankment. He landed in a heap beside a pool of stagnant water. He raised himself slowly to his feet, and instinctively began to brush the grit and cinders from his clothes. He was watching the shack on the dock from the corner of his eye, and he felt a sudden elation go pounding through his veins. There was a figure of a man framed in that doorway. The grin on his evil face showed that he had seen the whole procedure.

Franklyn P. Ralston had never gone in for amateur dramatics. He knew nothing of the art of acting. He simply became what he was supposed to be—a 'bo who had met with not unusual misfortune. He was weary, and footsore, and bruised of spirit. He limped, and he limped naturally because he had wrenched his ankle in landing. His face and hands were smudged. His nails were gritty. A dark stubble was beginning to show on his face. He stood up, hurt, bewildered, an enemy of society; and he saw standing before him in the doorway, one of his companions of the open road. He started across the lot.

"You ain't been on the road long, brother," said the man in the doorway.

Frank looked up. Had the man sensed that he was not what he pretended to be? He hesitated, just for an instant, and then his numbed wits seized upon the rôle he must play.

"That's the first time for me," he confessed, as he limped out on the pier, and dropped down to rub his ankle.

"New Yorker, ain't you?" the man wondered aloud.

Frank knew the big town pretty well. He could risk being tripped on the knowledge.

"Yeah," he said. "I was. I cut loose." He drew in a great breath of the sweet air. "This is the life," he added. It was the kind of amateurish and naïve remark which he suspected a novice on the road would make. It clicked with the stranger of the shack at once.

"Great, is it? Let me tell you somethin', kid! If you been trundled offn rattlers as often as I has, you'd not be thinkin' it great. You poor, spineless, white collar workers, what thinks there's romance in the open road."

Frank stood up.

"Listen, brother," he said, "I ain't no white-collar worker. I'm not givin' you my line, but I did good at it, and it was a man's work. It took some muscle, see?" He reached out, as if to take the man's wrist in his hand for a demonstration, but the man backed away.

"No need," he said, hastily and sidestepped into brilliant sunlight. "I can see I made a mistake. You been around."

FRANK let it go at that. For the first time he had full opportunity to study his man. He saw before him a lean, cadaverous fellow who had the yellowed mustache and sallow complexion of a clay eater. The man seemed to have a perpetual cynical mask in lieu of a normal face. His great chin sloped at a queer angle. His mouth was small, and twisted bitterly downward. His nose was an unpleasant-looking button. His pale eyes were close together, and seemed composed of various ingredients, the chief of which was unmelting ice. He was not too clean, either as to skin or wearing apparel. His arms hung very low, so that his great hands were not far from his knees, even when he stood erect, with shoulders squared. Frank, noticing those hands, felt uncomfortable. For a reason which he could not definitely classify, he thought of those hands as being the working appendages of a first-class strangler.

"How come you lit over this way?" the man asked. "Think you saw a sign out, 'Room and Board'?"

Frank shrugged.

"I figured you'd stake me to a little something to eat, anyway./ Fisherman, ain't you?"

That question, Frank saw at once, was a happy inspiration. The man rose to the bait.

"Yeah," he said, "yeah, I'm a fisherman." He seemed happy to have established an identity for himself. He said then, "Come along in, I'll stake you to a little something to eat." But as quickly as he spoke, he hesitated. He shook his head and muttered to himself.

"Well?" said Frank.

"No, I won't either," he decided. "I can't be feedin' everybody what comes along. And besides——" He turned away, looked toward the river. Frank followed his gaze. There was nothing in sight but a small, innocent-appearing motor boat.

The man shifted from one foot to the other.

"You better be lammin' out o' here," the man said. "You might get hurt."

Frank knew momentary panic, but his face revealed no such emotion.

"Yeah?" he said brassily, "I'm going to get hurt, am I? And who's gonna do that little thing? You? Here I am down and out. You been on the road yourself, you admit it; and yet you'd turn a pal away hungry. Funny, that is. Looks like you're running a little graft o' some kind on the side. Fisherman, are you? Where's your nets? Your boat?"

"Now, listen," said the man, "don't get me wrong. I don't turn a guy down out of cussedness. I got to watch out that——"

"Ah, a little racket, like I thought? Well, where I come from, my kind declares themselves in on anything that don't bear looking into by authorities from headquarters. But I'm on the move, now, so I'm not asking for no cut, see. Just as soon as this ankle gets to feelin' a little better, I'm off again. But right now, buddy, I'm up against it plenty. How about the cakes and coffee?"

The lean scavenger of the water front seemed inclined to give heed to that plea, but even as he stood undecided, the *put-put* of the motor on the oily river below the dock ceased its splutter and a man in soiled white ducks and undershirt swarmed up the rickety ladder and

faced Frank and the guardian of the pier.

Frank felt sudden misgivings. The man walked with authority. He was absurdly dressed, just the duck trousers and the shirt. He wore neither socks nor shoes. His face and arms and shoulders were blackened and cracked by the sun.

"Well, Brock," he said harshly, "what is this—a party? Are you here as a watchman or an innkeeper?"

He came forward as he spoke, having given one disparaging glance toward Frank. The reporter, waiting, vigilant, saw now that the man had something in his hand. He raised his arm suddenly, brought it down with a sharp, quick gesture. Brock fell away from the blow. The heavy billy cracked smartly against rotten wood. The man in the white ducks cursed loudly.

"Honest," Brock was saying, "honest, he's just a bum off the road. I saw him get kicked off that freight."

The sailor made no move to follow Brock, who had retreated down the pier. Frank shrewdly suspected that that blow with the blackjack had been more for effect than anything.

"Well," said the wielder of the billy, "I'm not here to argue." He took a step nearer Frank. "If you're wise, 'bo, you'll get off this property now; and you'll take the first rattler out o' town. Got it?"

Frank had no time to deliberate upon the rôle he should play. He simply fell into character.

"Sez you! Listen, guy, I don't take orders, see? And that billy don't mean a thing to me." As he spoke, he squared his shoulders, and they bulked large between the tight sleeves of his jacket. He was thankful, for perhaps the first time in his life, that he was such a solid hulk.

As Frank moved forward, the sailor stood his ground; even raised himself a little forward on his bare toes.

"I warned you, fellow," he told Frank, his eyes glittering. As he spoke he drew back his arm, the billy ready to smash down upon Frank's head.

Frank knew then how this must end. He closed with his man in a lunging tackle. The sailor raised his arm, brought it down, and then repeated, but Frank was still on his feet. He caught the sailor's arm, twisted the wrist, and the blackjack flopped to the rotten planking of the old pier. They clashed then, man to man, fist to fist.

Frank, in his time, had seen some rough-and-tumble fighting. He closed with his man, his fists pounding. They met, crashed, were flung backward from the impact. The man ducked for the billy, but Frank caught him, spun him about and cracked a right home to the jaw. The man shook his great head, raised his guard and closed in desperately. Frank gave him a long, swinging left, a short, quick right. It was over-and done with; the sailor was out cold on the pier.

FRANK hitched up his sagging belt. It was the instinctive gesture of a man who had every detail of the rôle he played, down to perfection.

"Now you've done it!" cried Brock, advancing from his stragetic position at the end of the pier. "Now you've done it! You've plastered the boss's ace contact man!"

Frank's eyes narrowed; his lips straightened into a grim line. He was getting somewhere now. The breaks were coming his way; he was making them come his way.

"What are you gassin' about?" he growled.

Brock snorted, prodded the fallen body of the sailor with a contemptuous toe.

"You got him," he said. "He's had that billy out and used it on me before. Damn! Stranger, you can battle."

"Huh!" Frank grunted contemptuously. "What do you expect of a——" He broke off, apparently in confusion, as if he had revealed more than he intended.

A light dawned in Brock's eyes.

"I've got you placed now!" said the cadaverous one in triumph. "Muscle man, ain't you? Worked with a New York mob? What went wrong—muscle in on some big shot, and bring the whole ward down around your head?"

"I ain't saying so."

Frank appeared cautious, but he was grinning now at Brock, who slapped his thigh and said, "I knew it! I knew it! You can't hide the breed. It crops out. Them shoulders weren't made for nothin' else." He stopped laughing suddenly. "Now, look here," he said, in an entirely different tone of voice, "you got me in a jam. you have. This guy'll kill me when he comes out of it."

"Not while I'm around," said Frank. "You was going to stake me to cakes and coffee. I don't forget a pal." It was utterly distasteful to the reporter, this rôle he played; a pal of this spindly-shanked wharf rat! But in the back of his mind, always, was the thought of Jimmy Davis, and of that editorial in the *Herald*—that reckless, mocking editorial: "We accept that challenge!"

Brock was still thoughtful.

"Look here," he said, "maybe you and me could do business."

"I don't get you; you mean a racket?"

"The only racket," said Brock with certainty. "You're a right guy. I can see that. And bein' a muscle man in the past, you must know the ropes. Ever heard of Black Benny?"

"Hijacker," said Frank, "and don't cut me in on any dealings if you play ball with him."

"Hell, no! It's the other side of the fence for us. That dirty murderer lifted three of our trucks in two nights. Caught us down-State. Mountain country down there; and we ain't got the right protection. Cut down two of our men, he did. The third one's laying up with two slugs in him yet."

"I ain't askin' for this," Frank warned Brock. "I'm pullin' freight. I don't mix with that racket no more. It's the open air, and the warm sunshine, and the windin' road for me."

"Nerts!" said Brock. "There ain't a man livin' that's gonna let a soft thing get by. Look at me. What do I do? A little phonin' on cloudy nights, and the hangin' out of a lantern. I don't touch the stuff. I'm in the clear. I don't see nothin', hear nothin', know nothin'. And I'm pullin' down the gravy. The only troubles I got in the world is that puddin'-faced yak on the floor there. Listen, let's you and me make a deal?"

"I'm not makin' no deals," said Frank. "How about those cakes and that coffee we was discussin' a while back."

A look of cupidity came into Brock's sharp face. His button nose twitched in anticipation of the bargain he hoped to drive.

"More than cakes and coffee in it for you," he said.

"Well," Frank capitulated, "I'll talk it over maybe, while I eat; if I do."

"Wait a minute," said Brock, "what about this guy?" He again prodded the recumbent figure. The man was twitching now; showing signs of returning consciousness. He made of himself, as he sprawled there, a decidedly unpleasant spectacle.

"Leave him alone," Frank directed. "I'll put the pressure on him again if he gets funny; or if you want——"

He was bluffing now, but Brock didn't know that; Brock thought that he saw the light of murder in Frank's eyes.

"No! No!" Brock protested. He seemed unnerved. "We couldn't do away with him."

"Well," said Frank, "murder's the only way out, as I look at it. I'll be on my way as soon as I get a bite of grub.

And you—what will you do, if he snaps out of it after I'm gone? Got a gun?"

The man shook his head.

"No, nothing like that. They wouldn't let me; the bull might go through this shack. I got to be like what I'm supposed to be—a fisherman."

"It's your funeral," Frank shrugged. "Guess you'd better get me that snack we been talking about. I come here for a hand-out, not to shove my nose into a mess of trouble."

LISTEN, buddy," Brock said, "you got to see me through. I'm gettin' sweaty about this deal. I ain't no bruiser, like you. I ain't built for it. Look here, let me make you a deal."

"Nix on that, 'bo."

"But look—just for to-night. Stick around. Put the slug on this guy if he comes out of it and starts the rough stuff. You don't know him, buddy. He'd put a weight around my neck, like he'd do for a kitten."

Frank hesitated.

"What's your deal?" he asked.

"Look, it's like this: I gotta duck. He's sore on me now. But you can handle him. Let me lam over the hill, just till they bring to-night's load in. I'll tell you what to do. It's simple. I know what he come for. He comes to look over the lay o' things, and give me the word for the tip off."

"It don't make sense," said Frank.

"Hell! Listen, they been hijackin' us. So what do we do? We bring it up the river. I tip off the trucks. They hit in here at three on the dot. Experienced men hustle the stuff off the mob's boat and the trucks wheel it to the up-State trade. We're covered above here, see?"

"Your taking chances, tellin' me this, Brock."

"Heh! I'm laughing! What could you do? Think a Federal squeal would get you anything? Nix on that. But listen. You handle this guy for me and you can have this end of the racket. All you got to do is hold it down for one or two nights maybe. They don't run every night. And then I'll be back."

"You'll be back? And how will you be any better off then?"

"I'm gonna thumb my way to New York. I got a pal there that's been lookin' for the sailor. He'll thank me for tippin' him. There won't be no sailor after that."

Frank was beginning to see red, but he forced himself to laugh.

"Smooth," he said. "That's you—smooth all over. But me, what about me? Where's my split? You can shell out now, Brock. I got enough on you. You're mouth is little, but it talked big for a while."

"You—a bum, got something on me? Heh! Take it somewhere and see!"

"Maybe, but I want a split if I'm doing your work."

"All right," Brock made a gesture. "I'll fix it with you. Look, here's the number you call. Use the phone booth over in the station, but go between trains, cause the bulls meet every train. Call this number, see. Say, 'Is this you, Moby?' If the answer is, 'Yes, Dick.' that means all clear; you got the right party. Then you say, 'I got some furniture to be moved. Will you come around in the morning?' "

"Is that all?" Frank wanted to know.

"Wait, I'm telling you. You come back then, see. There's two lanterns in the shack. You swing down under the pier on the planking, and if everything is O. K., you let the plain light show. But if there's a hitch give 'em the red lantern. They'll lay offshore ten minutes, and if you ain't showed clear by then, it's off till you get word again. But boy, if it's off you lam out, too. Because they'll be expecting this rat on the floor to come back with word. They don't know anything about what's happened. He always goes uptown to take care of that angle."

"And who will take care of that to-night?"

"I will. I know who to see. And then I'll thumb my way to New York. It will be curtains for this bird before the next trip, and I'll be in the clear. If you want to play ball you might be able to chisel his job."

Frank now had a concise idea of what was happening in town. He wondered how far Jimmy Davis had come along the same trail, before they gave him the works. Certain it was that he had not worked this angle. Brock would not make a second such blunder. Only the fact that Frank had played his chosen rôle so well, gave him his present advantage. That, and the fact that he had saved Brock a severe beating. In that moment he felt a little sorry for the man, but he stiffened his nerve, with the thought of what had happened to Jimmy Davis.

"All right, Brock," he came to a sudden decision, "I'll play ball. I'll cover you. You been white with me." He hesitated, and then decided abruptly that he might as well take the plunge. "But wait, Brock," he said. "I heard the shacks on that freight talkin' while we were gettin' on water down at the tower. Somebody had the works put to 'em, around here last night or this morning. I am lettin' myself in for trouble?"

Brock was contemptuous.

"Him! Just a reporter. Listen, what a guy don't know don't hurt him, see? This egg from the paper had pulled some detective stuff. The boss put a knife in a guy called Barco, see, and this reporter from the paper got hep to it, somehow. He works himself in with one of the boys on the truck, and the guy gets sopping wet with liquor and talks about his three-in-the-morning job. Bragging, see? Well, last night the load comes in, and this guy from the paper tries to put the finger on the big boss. Working alone, he was. Well, what could the boss do? He's got his gunmen with him, like always, and they let the newspaper kid have it. He was only a young guy. Now me, personally, I don't like that stuff. I say, reason with a man, buy him off, but don't kill him. I ain't got no stomach for murder. Nor fighting. It's like with the sailor here—he'd have beat the life out of me with that billy if you hadn't come in like a pal, and put the slug on him. Boy, what a tap! But look, he's rollin' over!"

"You better lam," said Frank. "I'll put him to sleep again; but wait, how about a couple of jitneys? I ain't got a cent, for that phone call."

"Some nickels in the can on the shelf," said Brock. "I'm hittin' over the hill. Better bend a pipe on that guy before he comes too wide awake and makes you get a sweat up!"

Frank did not resort to a piece of lead pipe, but seizing a coiled line hanging from a cleat, he soon bound and gagged the recumbent figure of the sailor. He then carried the neatly trussed gentleman into the shack and dumped him on the bunk in the corner. Returning into the waning sunlight, he saw that Brock had started up the hill. He watched the retreating figure with a grim smile, and then cut across lots to the railroad station. He called the chief.

"Listen," he said, and gave a rapid-fire description of the fugitive. "He's starting up the main street now," he added. "Pick him up. You can't touch him for vagrancy, because he's packing a good roll, I'd guess. But pull him in on suspicion." He added more concise information, and then suggested that the chief get in touch with the Federal men. "There'll be a haul for them to-night, too," he added. Having delivered his information, Frank hastened back to the shack on the pier. He knew that before him there was a long, but not a lonely vigil. Between dusk and

three a. m., he expected that the sailor was going to do some talking—at gun-point if necessary.

IT was bright that night, except for the intervals when the gray clouds in the heavens scudded across the yellow moon. Frank wondered that they dare take a chance on unloading in such brilliance. It threatened to put a hitch in their plans. But the wind lifted, the clouds thickened, and shortly before three o'clock, it was all that Frank could do to see the dim outline of the boat slipping up the bay.

The trucks had arrived, were waiting at the edge of the field. He had been worried that the drivers might investigate. It had occurred to him to simulate the huskiness of Brock's voice when he called the mysterious Moby. Apparently there had been no suspicion aroused. It would seem now that all he had to do, would be to show the plain lantern light as a come-on signal. With the lantern in his hand, he swung down under the pier and found that planking was laid there, however precariously, so that a careful man could work his way toward the river end of the pier. He showed the lantern, and the boat came in.

As he waited, he knew that nerve-tingling suspense which accompanies such exciting moments. The night was chill, but he found that the palms of his hands were sweaty. Behind him the river town was asleep on the hillside. How startled the good burghers would be to know what was happening this night on a shore of the famous Hudson!

But he had no time for such thoughts now. He was, above all, a newspaperman. He had accepted, on behalf of his paper and his craft, this challenge of gangland. He gave a thought to Jimmy Davis, and his eyes narrowed. What was that that the chief had said about getting justice from gangland? A smart lawyer would break the case with an insanity plea as final resort? The jury could be threatened? There was not sufficient power in the government any longer to curb this new menace to civilization?

The boat was being warped in now. Frank backed away, backed to the ladder. and pulled himself up on the pier. Brock had said that he saw nothing, heard nothing, knew nothing. That was Frank's cut, then, to stay hidden. He, too, must see nothing, hear nothing, know nothing.

But what of the Federal men? Would they be waiting? Had they had time to get here? And the police, and the sheriff, and possibly the State troopers? Were they waiting to seize the murderers? He knew an aching desire for a pipe of tobacco; but huddled there against the wall of the shack, he could take no refuge in tobacco. To-night, he must square things for Jimmy. To-night, the chief of this mob must fall into the hands of the chief of police. But could they make the charge stick? Even with the spineless Brock turning State's evidence, would it go over? What reprisal would gangland have to offer? It was an upset state of affairs. Everything was out of proportion. And why couldn't he stay hidden? Why must he be out here, where he was watching for the first load to come off—watching for a glimpse of the man who was responsible for the death of Jimmy Davis? Good, decent Jimmy—a square-shooter that lad had been! And now the words of the editorial came back to him. They painted a menacing picture. "When gangdom raises its mailed fist and strikes at the voice of the people—the press——" A sort of terror swept him, at the thought of what that meant. It was not one lone reporter who had been killed. It went deeper than that; it indicated more hideous things to follow. Somewhere, somehow, he told himself desperately, there must be some solution to the prob-

lem; there must be some way of damming that flood that was sweeping across the entire country.

"We accept that challenge!"

The words flared before his eyes; it was the voice of hysteria, mob hysteria which shrieked in the night!

But in cold sober fact, it was the voice of a man in a sporty topcoat and spats—spats!—who had raised a frenzied voice.

"On the pier! By the shack! Who's that! Brock! Brock! Who——"

Odd, but Frank Ralston was fascinated by those spats. He knew who would be wearing spats in this crew. He saw the figure, standing there in the moonlight. He saw a hand dart into a pocket. The hand came up. There was a flash of flame. And crouching there, wet with sweat, Frank Ralston answered the shot. He pumped lead. And now in the field behind him there was a shrieking confusion. Man against man in self-defense. Again lightning stabbed from that gun, and Frank felt himself half spun around. But as he fell he fired.

The figure raised its arms. It went over, backward—down.

"And some smart lawyer," the words reëchoed in Frank's brain, "will get him off on an insanity plea; or the jury won't convict; or——" He laughed. There would be no jury. The verdict was even now returned; sentence passed and executed!

Frank crumpled into unconsciousness. His last coherent words, "We accept that challenge!"

IT was daybreak when Franklyn P. Ralston return to the conscious world. He was stiff and aching. He could not move one shoulder. His arm was swathed in bandages. There was plaster on his cheek, his chin, his head. But he could stand without swaying, and he could think coherently. He looked at the man in the blue and the gold of the law.

"Chief," he said, "did they get them?"

"They did."

"And the head of the mob, Capristi?"

"They're grappling for the body," said the chief.

Frank was silent for a minute, and then he drew a deep breath.

"Treat me to a ride over to the office in the police car, will you?" he asked. "I've a job to do."

The chief understood. Franklyn P. Ralston had been a bum, a gangster, a killer; but he was, first and last, a newspaperman. And there would be some people interested to know the result of that challenge to the press!

A new story by Leonard Lupton will be published soon in this magazine.

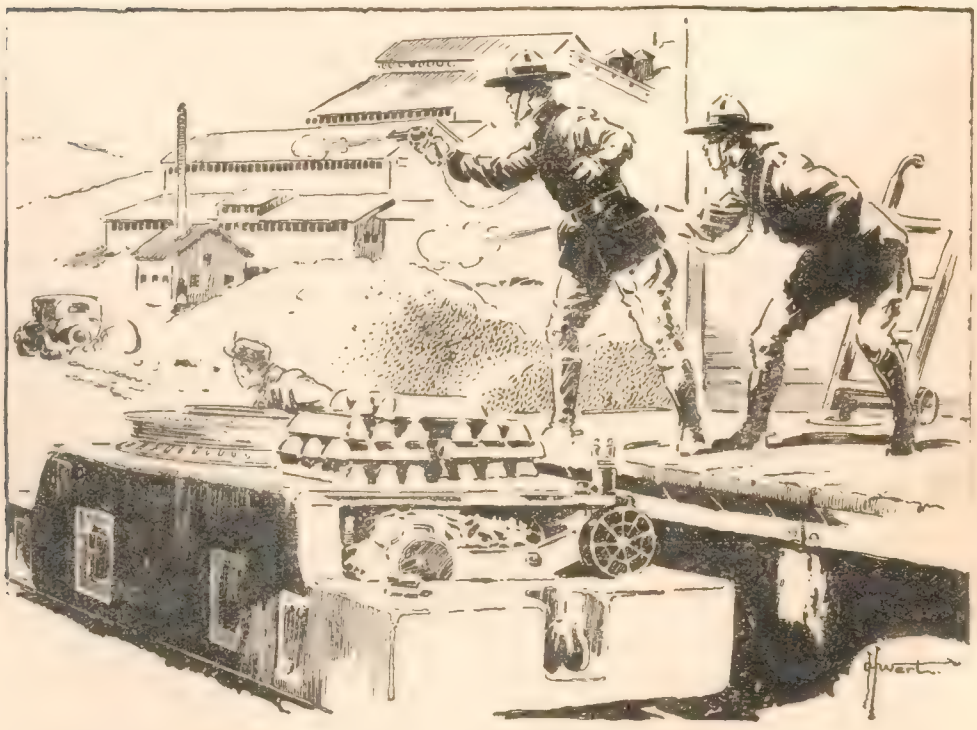
SOLAR COLLISIONS MAKE METEORS

MANY astronomers still hold to the belief that meteors are "left-over chunks of matter," but this, in the opinion of Doctor Charles P. Oliver, is incorrect. Doctor Oliver, who is the director of the Flower Observatory of the University of Pennsylvania, backs up his theory with many years of close observation.

Meteors, he says, result when great bodies, far out in the universe beyond our own solar system, come crashing together. The pieces are thrown off to go hurtling through space. It has been determined, he further declares, that some meteors are millions of years old, and that they were undoubtedly part of vast unknown worlds at one time.

A Ticket to Nowhere

By Lieutenant SEYMOUR G. POND
Air Corps, R. F. C.



In Three Parts—Part II

The Story So Far:

JIM FOSTER, reporter on a Cleveland paper, sick of his work, quits and spends almost his last cent on a Pullman ticket to his Florida home town. In the train he dreams of palms, sunshine, and beaches, but in the morning is surprised to find, instead, snow, white desolation, and gaunt pines. He has taken the wrong train, and his car stands alone beside a remote, unknown station. The conductor offers no help. Foster is too proud to wire his family.

He is in Canada; that much he knows. But because he has no passport, he is forced to dodge the customs men. A dash through some woods brings him to a grimy little town on a lake shore. The lake, he learns, is Huron, and the port is Godrich. Noting a yacht at a pier, he applies for a navigator's job and is almost accepted by Mr. Allison, the owner, who is about to go to Florida. Grace, Allison's daughter, is aboard.

Griffin, superintendent of Allison's Canadian silver mine, appears. He had been engaged for the navigating work, and is angry at being shoved aside. In a quarrel between Griffin and Foster, a pipe is knocked aside, setting the boat afire. Although the boat is saved, Fos-

ter is held responsible, and is jailed. Released, but embittered, he does a little work for the Godrich paper, and, taking the editor's advice, gets a job in Allison's mine. Miss Allison has given him a letter to the foreman, but he does not use it.

At the mine, there is a second encounter with Griffin, who assigns Foster to one of the mine levels and then, as the new man enters an elevator, monkeys with the cable and sends Foster hurtling down the shaft to almost certain death.

CHAPTER IX.
DEATH'S SHADOW.

WITH throbbing brain and pounding heart Foster struggled to gather his senses. What had happened? Where was he? Why was his head booming and booming as though it would crackle under the pressure? Where had he been? Oh, yes! The elevator—he had gotten into it. Then it had hurtled down, down into the bowels of the mine.

He drew his numbed arms to him, and with straining eyes stared ahead in his strange prison. Blackness! The most opaque, impenetrable blackness that he had ever seen or felt.

He listened with aching eardrums. Aside from an eerie ringing in his ears there was nothing but silence, a pressing and ghostly silence. The ringing in his ears was growing fainter.

Then from afar off he thought he could hear the dim tapping of hammers. The noise seemed to be followed by a low rattling of the cables at the side of his prison cage. He wondered where the elevator had stopped—how far they had dropped. He had thought it to be the end. There came a rustling of form and clothing before him. The elevator operator was stirring from his dazed stupor.

"That half-witted madman!" The voice cursed vehemently through the shadows.

Foster listened. It was a ghastly place. The words reëchoed upward in hollow mockery through the great mine shaft.

"You—you all right?" questioned Foster. "Hurt?"

"No! I'm not hurt none. But that tunnel rat will do this once too often one of these days and some one is going to get killed. The danger ain't over yet, either. We're not down yet."

Foster listened like some one in a crazy nightmare.

"He's done this before?" asked Foster, amazed.

"Yeah, but not with me. That's Gangrene's perverted sense of humor. If I didn't have a wife and five starvin' kids at home I'd go up there and break his neck. But I can't afford to. I'd lose my job. Somebody'll hand *him* a fast 'ride' one o' these days, though. You watch. No man gets away with things like this. We've got a lot of Indian half-breeds that are bad babies to fool with. They hate him. We all hate him. You're a new hand, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, Gangrene seems to be taking a special interest in you early. Watch him. He stops at nothing—nothing short of touching off a blast of dynamite when you are walking across the allotted spot."

"Oh, I'll watch him, all right," acknowledged Foster grimly. "But what are we going to do now—here?"

"Nothing, friend. Just wait and—hope!"

FOSTER ground his teeth. It was a black hole of doom with the shadow of death winging over them. He could hear the noise of workmen far below them, more distinctly now.

"They're working on the cables down below?" asked Foster.

"Yeah."

"They'll clear them, I suppose, eh?"

"You never know. They always have

before, but there always has to be a 'first' time, too, you know. The cables are all fouled and snarled over the winches down there. If they get them cleared of the drums without any of them snapping, we're O. K. If one goes, we're let down. That'd be the last ride."

"Pleasant situation," murmured Foster.

"Yeah. We'd be there now, too, if I hadn't thrown the emergency lever just as I had. Of course, that's what this mine hell-cat figures we'll do—get ourselves out of the mess that he puts us into. But if there ever——"

Ripping *cr-ash!* Flying sparks! Cables screaming past the open bars of the elevator cage with a sickening, shrieking howl. Everything fell away and out from under Foster once more. The blast of wind at their ears again. Sparks everywhere.

"This is the end!" yelled the elevator operator.

He was working violently, however, with his emergency lever through the dark. The smell of burning rubber reached Foster's nostrils again. He heard a shriek as though the brakes of a great locomotive had been applied too hurriedly. He felt his body shoot upward off the floor. Then he was flung violently to the bottom of the cage, his body scraping painfully along the sides of the bars. The whine of speed and of flailing cables was dying into a thinner, vibrant wail. He heard the elevator operator heave a deep sigh.

"They let go a bad snarl. It was a wonder she didn't snap with the check-up we took on that last drop. Good steel cable. Looks as though we'd make it down to the shelf now."

The elevator was riding down under control once more. A shaft of sickly yellow light passed before them. A half dozen begrimed faces peered through the light toward them, paleness in their smeared cheeks.

"This is the tenth shelf. We've one more to go," remarked the operator.

He held up a moment, however, stopped his car. The elevator answered her controls in a satisfactory manner once more. A big, square-jawed head peered in anxiously toward the interior of the elevator.

"You all right, Hank, eh?"

"Yeah, Bill. She's all right now. But what a ride that Gangrene gave us!"

"I thought as much when I heard all the commotion. We ought to put *him* in there some day and drop him the full four hundred feet from the hill."

"Yeah."

Hank, the operator, let his lever back. They dropped quietly for another thirty or forty feet through that grim shaft of darkness to the next or level "shelf," as Hank had termed it.

"Well, friend. Here you are. This is the bottom shelf—No. 11, at last! You'll find O'Toole, your straw boss, down there at the right-hand end of the tunnel. They're drilling a new vein. Good luck to you, friend."

"Thanks, Hank," replied Foster. "I guess we'll hardly forget our meeting together."

"Hardly."

FOSTER stepped out onto the soft soil of the tunnel before him. A number of men crowded about the opened door. They stared at Foster like some one walking out of a coffin. A hum of voices babbled out behind him, to Hank, asking how the disaster had happened. The air, Foster noted, was dank. There was a foul odor to it, too. He was walking toward the end of the tunnel where there came to his ears a booming of machinery working, when a sharp voice called to him:

"Hey, stranger! Where do you think *you're* going?"

Foster flung around. He was himself once more. A tall figure with a

bright carbide lamp hung from his hat gazed at him questioningly.

"Why, I'm looking for Mr. O'Toole. I was told that he is down at the end of the tunnel."

"Hmph!" grunted the tall one. "Sure, and he is, but you can't go down there—not that way!" He pointed toward Foster's hat. "There's a lot of open fissures along the trail where we've drilled and O'Toole is two thousand feet into the tunnel. You'll have to have a lamp on your hat or you'll fall into some o' them holes and be a-breaking your neck. You can draw one there in the small storeroom just behind the elevator shaft. New man?"

"Yes."

"Well, watch your step down here. This is the worst level of the lot. And when you walk down that tunnel keep your feet off any wires you happen to see on the ground. They're high tension for working those big diamond drills. Now and then water seeps through and they get wet. Worse, the water sometimes runs over copper and other pyrites through the rock and forms acids and this acid eats through the insulation of the wire. When you step on one of those spots it's—well, it's simply a quiet ride to the little white Kipawa cemetery. We sent an old-timer up only two days ago. Keep your eyes and wits open, if you want to collect your first week's pay. After that your chances are better."

"Many thanks," said Foster. "I understand."

Grunting to himself the old miner passed on down the tunnel in the opposite direction. Foster retraced his steps to the small storeroom pointed out by his adviser and inquired of the clerk there:

"I'm looking for Mr. O'Toole down at the end of the tunnel. I believe I'll need a lamp—a hat lamp."

"No! No hat lamps here. But they's head lamps," corrected the storekeeper, bitingly. He tossed a lamp and its carbide container across the counter. A block of paper followed it. "Sign that! And if you lose 't, er bust it, it comes outa your wages. Get that?"

"Hm-m-m, yes."

Foster took up the lamp and adjusted the strap around his hat. Rather bewilderedly he looked at the carbide container.

"You hangs that on your belt—on your belt! On your belt!" stated the storekeeper testily. "When the light gets low you turns that little valve at the top and that lets water down on top of it; but don't give 'er too much, 'er she may pop off on you and singe the top o' your head."

Foster nodded, looked over his paraphernalia, and started to walk away.

"Hey, you! Come back here!" commanded the storekeeper in his biting voice. "Got your gas mask?"

"Gas mask?" Foster stared at the other. Where was he going, to war again? "Why, no, I haven't."

"Well, you *must* have one o' them. They's CO2 gas after the blasting," explained the storeman airily. "It puts out your lights if you ain't got a mask—and I don't mean the one on your hat neither." He tossed another object across the counter. "Tie it well under the chin when you smells gas. Sign here!"

Foster signed. With a wry smile he tucked the mask strap under his belt and fastened it there. Then he adjusted the lamp, lighted it and fitted it to his hat which was a dark tan of soft felt. The carbide container, as directed, he hung from his belt slightly behind him and out of the way. Then he struck off down the tunnel. He wondered how many more times, if any, he might be sent back for additional equipment. From outward indications he was certainly going to work in a tough place with a tougher crew. Well, he was soft, he told himself; it would do him good, physically.

THE tunnel, he noted, was not a great deal higher than the top of his hat. As he got farther down he realized that it was getting narrower. At times there was soft dirt at his feet, and then he would come out onto a rocky stretch. It was there that he could better see the vast number of air hose and lines of electric wire that fed the machinery. His head lamp threw a long and brilliant beam of light through the black distances before him.

Suddenly a black abyss opened under him. He staggered back slightly with an unsteady balance. An open crevice fully five feet in width yawned below him. It was a good three feet in depth. At its bottom a small stream of water trickled along. The electric and air lines were carried across by a number of boards. Foster realized that without his head lamp he would certainly have fallen into that black hole. At the least he would probably have broken an arm or leg on the sharp stone ledge. He leaned back and made a springing leap across the crevice.

The walking from there on was more difficult, over jagged rocks and stony ledges, indicating that the work there had been hurried and as yet unfinished. The roar of the great drills drowned out all other sound now. A flood of light met him as he reached the end of the tunnel. To all sides there was stone, below, and above—a solid rock tunnel. Fifteen or more men were working in the glare of brilliant electric lights, their bodies silhouetted.

Pieces of rock were flying here and there. The din of the drills was almost deafening. As he looked he saw that there were four great drills, seven or eight feet in length, working like human borers into the stone wall ahead. Suddenly, above the driving roar of the drills he heard a series of wild, animated shouts—shouts of intense delight and happiness. He moved into the crowd. A thin, medium-sized man with a cap, its visor swung down backward on his head, threw a long coppered switch. The roar, for the moment, ceased. The entire crew then leaped forward and with brilliant droplights inspected their work.

"We struck it!" cried the man with the cap.

"Yea! Yea! Yea!" the shouts of cheer echoed and reëchoed down the long tunnel.

"I knew it! I knew it!" shouted the man with the cap. "After we hit that rhyolite sill I knew damned well we'd strike the old vein again!"

The crew laughed hilariously. The capped man stepped quickly back toward the switch.

"Let 'er take the drills, boys!" he ordered, and swung in the switch again.

WITH a mighty roar the great drills drove into the stone once more. The man with the cap faced Foster as he straightened up from his switch. There was a glowing smile on his face.

"Oh, hello!" he said cordially. "Who are you?"

"Foster's my name, sir. I was sent down by Mr. Griffin to find Mr. O'Toole—to go to work."

"That's my handicap in life," answered the miner, smilingly. "What's your line in mining?"

"No experience, Mr. O'Toole," said Foster. He had to shout at the top of his voice to make his words heard.

O'Toole's jaws set to with a click.

"Did Griffin send you to level No. 11, positively?"

"Yes."

Foster noted that O'Toole had goggles stuck over his cap. The boss driller stared at Foster, head to foot, quizzically.

"That's funny," he stated sharply. "We're on important work here now. No time to break in new men. Hazardous, too. Ready to work—in those

clothes?" he asked, all in the same voice.

"Yes, sir."

"Got goggles?"

"No."

The crew boss handed his own goggles across to Foster.

"Here," he shouted. "Take mine. I know how to shield my eyes. Get a shoulder under the arm of that drill," he pointed to a long steel shaft that jutted out into the tunnel, "and watch your driller. When he moves, you move. Watch yourself, too. Keep your wits sharp. No time for mistakes here."

Foster nodded understandingly. Kneeling, he shoved his shoulder under the great vibrating arm of the big drill. As he did so the head driller looked around at the end of his jarring mechanism. On seeing Foster he grinned and nodded; then he eased down with some of his strength to let Foster take part of the weight.

On the far side of the tunnel Foster now made out several other men working with pickaxes along the walls. Obscured in the dancing shadows he had not noticed them before. At their feet were a number of conveyor cars on a narrow track used for transporting the ore. The men were filling these cars. As Foster stared he could see a glistening white streak of platinum color. Silver! Precious metal!

CHAPTER X.
BRIGHT SILVER.

WITH particles of stone flying to all sides of him, the drive and pound of great sledges, and the shouts of the drilling crew ringing in his ears, Foster had his first initiation into underground silver mining.

Little by little he could see their pathway lengthening as they pushed resolutely forward into the dim innards of the earth. At times it felt to him that his shoulder would snap with the great vibrating rod that bore down upon him with mighty weight. He would bunch his coat under it, and then shift that from time to time.

There was no talking while the drills were going, and it seemed to Foster that they never stopped. The work was carried forward with clocklike precision in hand signals, gestures, and nods from one to the other, each knowing almost beforehand what the other wanted of his companion worker.

It looked to Foster like a slow process, but rock was a tough customer, he realized, to bore through. They seemed to be boring small holes, mostly. He wondered about that. They weren't just digging in with the drills and scooping out any ore or clear metal, but making small holes here and there.

No one seemed to notice him. He was like a tail end to the big drill before him, just a sort of a human prop that moved and kept its proper place without any adjustment. From time to time he saw the small cars of ore at the far side of the tunnel walls, move off and disappear into the black shadows behind—the ore going up to the bright sunlight. Then he saw O'Toole reach over, tap several of the drillers on the shoulders. Finishing that, he stepped back and threw the switch. The drilling roar stopped. The silence was almost painful.

"Let 'er down, buddy," ordered the driller in front of Foster. "That was a long spurt. Shoulder sore?"

"I don't know," laughed Foster. "It just sort of left me about a half an hour ago."

"You'll get used to it," answered the driller. "But the first couple of days are hell."

Foster straightened to his feet. O'Toole looked his way analytically.

"We're going to make a small blast now," he explained. "We've drilled nine holes. The men will put in the

powder and touch 'em off. Come on. We'll move back a pace."

"Mighty interesting work," commented Foster. "This is my first experience in any mine work."

"Like it?"

"Yes. Very much."

"Well, then, the work will probably like you. Keep your eyes open and be sharp and you'll get a better job as soon as you can hold it. Men are leaving all the time."

"Good!" acknowledged Foster. "By the way, what was all that cheering back there when I first arrived, Mr. O'Toole?"

"Oh, that? Well, you see we had followed a very valuable silver vein for nearly nine hundred feet. Then we met up with an eighteen-foot fracture and lost it. Sometimes you never find the other side of it. It may run to various angles or directions. And then we located this old granddaddy of 'em all. If it's what it appears, I think we can run a thirty-five-hundred-foot horizontal tunnel. It will mean thousands of dollars to the company and we'll get a bonus."

Foster listened intently. It was fascinating. No wonder these men had their hearts in their work.

"Do you always drill, and then blast, Mr. O'Toole?"

"Oh, no. It all depends on the geological structure of the earth. We've run into a lot of stone here—also slate and lead. We use what is known as a Stope hammer drill on the softer rock, and go faster. On soil alone we use picks and shovels. You'll get acquainted with those later," he grinned sardonically. "When we hit hard rock or granite we use diamond drills. Nothing stops *them*. Get your gas mask ready!" warned O'Toole.

Foster lifted his mask from off his belt.

"The blasting powder throws off a carbon-monoxide gas mixed with nitric oxide, and it's deadly stuff. Keep your mask on as long as you see me with mine. Back, back more!"

At once he flattened himself back against the tunnel walls. Foster followed suit. He was commencing to form a solid liking for this clear-eyed, if pale-faced, underground miner who was so decent with his explanations and so efficient with his work. A sharp whistle cut the stillness behind them. Foster heard O'Toole groan.

"Griffin!" he muttered, and the intonation was not pleasant.

"O'Toole!" a sharp, commanding voice crackled through the shadows. "Get those damned cross timbers out of there. Cut out that yammering with the new man—and think of your work. You're ready to dynamite, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir. You're right."

Foster felt guilty. Indirectly he had been the cause of O'Toole's reprimand. O'Toole blew his whistle. The men straightened from their setting of the powder charges.

"Out with those cross timbers! Hold the powder work!" he bellowed.

The men leaped back and jerked out the great six-by-ten timbers that had been crossed before the drill holes. Foster jumped in behind O'Toole and did everything he could to aid in the work. In a few minutes the clearing had been completed. Then Foster overheard Griffin talking to O'Toole:

"How's that new—navigator?" It was punctuated with an ugly laugh.

"He's all right, Griffin. Willing, and sharp."

"Well, watch that he keeps busy!"

"He does that without watching."

Foster looked up. He had not meant to be eavesdropping. It was simply unavoidable in that small space. He saw Griffin's face cloud up as he did so. The mine superintendent then strode off disgustedly. As he left he shouted over his shoulder:

"Forget those cross timbers just once more and not one of you in the crew will get your bonus! A bunch of rattle-brained bats for miners!"

O'Toole shook his head hopelessly after Griffin.

"He's a world beater in his work, but I wouldn't have his disposition—not if you gave me the Sullivan mines!" commented the drilling foreman. "He's right about those cross timbers, though. When we leave those and blast, the timber gets buried. Later it decays, and here underground it forms 'black damp,' and that kills men. It's another deadly gas; they call it CH4, or methane. You don't smell it. It just sneaks up on you like a boa constrictor and strangles you."

Foster nodded. They were backing off again for the final touch-off of the charge of dynamite.

"Is it true," asked Foster quietly, "that Mr. Griffin is such a talented mine man?"

"Yes, indeed," answered O'Toole. "He's perfectly uncanny when it comes to mining. Underground mining is a specialty all in itself. This man seems to have an instinct almost like that of an animal's when it comes to scenting trouble and arriving, just as he did now, just a moment before an improper move is made. He sees everything, and knows everything—that pertains to mining. If he didn't—well, he would have been kicked out of here five years ago—and you'll know that's true when I tell you, a new man! Hold your ears! Flatten!" warned O'Toole.

Foster jabbed his fingers into his ears. He flattened against the tunnel wall. Came a livid, blinding flash of white. For the moment it blinded Foster. Then came that lull of darkness, or what seemed darkness—even in the glare of the electric lights that were burning. Bits of stone and dirt were falling to all sides of them. Foster felt some one clutching at his arm—O'Toole. He was pointing to Foster's gas mask, and slipping his own over his head.

"Quick!" he ordered. "Get it on!"

FOSTER slipped into his mask, pulled the strap up tight under his chin. He could see the clouds of smoke and dust moving off rapidly down the tunnel, though. It was silent—as only those far-underground caverns can be. From afar off down the tunnel, somewhere, Foster could hear the great blowers pulling away complainingly on the foul mine gases—and so the smoke clouds were slowly pulled on out the long tunnel and upward.

O'Toole was slipping along the walls of the tunnel now and looking upward. Foster watched him curiously. What was he doing? Then he saw that there was a small box hung from a peg on the wall. O'Toole was making for that. He lifted it off the peg and lowered it. There were several compartments to the box, Foster noted. It was a strange-appearing wooden case. In part it looked almost like a bird cage, with ribs down its sides where the air went through. O'Toole spun the box around on a rope from the top of it and then opened a small aperture at the base and reached in his hand.

In a trice he had brought out a dishevelled little fluff of something yellow and pretty. Foster stared incredulously. It *was* a bird—a little yellow canary. It was as dead as a rock. O'Toole tossed it over to Foster with a grim glance. Foster caught it, somewhat awed. O'Toole swept his hand out into the mine tunnel with a gesture and then pointed to his nostrils and back to the bird, indicating that the gases had killed it. Foster nodded.

With another spinning of the cage O'Toole dropped down on two or three little shutters at the sides of the box, and waited. For a number of minutes the men stood about, while the tunnel gases went sweeping out. Then O'Toole took

another flip at the canary box and ran up one of the small curtains on its side. He lifted the box so that Foster could see. Foster stared in through the small wooden bars. A downy little yellow fellow was staggering around from one foot to the other, drunkenly—but he was holding his own, even if it was a tough fight. O'Toole watched him and nodded in the affirmative. Then he reached down for his whistle and blew it loudly. He lifted off his own gas mask. Foster followed suit.

"It's O. K., now," said O'Toole. "We keep these canaries here to test the air, as you may have judged. A man can *live* in air that kills a canary, but it won't do him any good. But, if the canary can struggle along and live, then we know that the air isn't too bad for man. They're a great little safeguard."

"Certainly are," supported Foster. "But rather hard on the canaries, I'd say."

"Sure is, but man's life is valuable. Don't forget that."

The men all moved up toward the end of the tunnel, then. Shovels and picks were brought up from farther down the sides of the tunnel. A shovel was tossed to Foster—a heavy, short-handled one, it was. Conveyor cars were rushed up, then.

"Dig 'em up, men!" shouted O'Toole vigorously. "Toss in the coins for Old Man Allison! Bright silver, boys! Let 'er go!"

Bright silver! There *was* something gripping about the mine work. Foster was commencing to be glad that he was alive and—working once more. He pitched in with a will with the others and helped dig out the great chunks of ore and dirt that went ever back and up, back and up, through the great shadows of the tunnel to the bright skies above and off for the smelter.

Thus the work went forward throughout the day—and days. On that day Foster just barely "broke the ice" in mining work, but it placed a new interest in his heart. With O'Toole he had struck a responsive and friendly chord, and that helped a great deal.

CHAPTER XI.
AT BLUE SKY LEVEL.

THE end of the day found Foster, his feet dangling over the trailing edge of one of the small conveyor cars, squeaking down the thin, polished rails toward the elevator shaft. Around him the remainder of "lower 11" crew chatted and made merry as the cars rolled along.

In the car behind him, facing forward, sat the jolly-faced O'Toole, like a different man now that work was being left behind him. Foster pushed back some of the ore—ore that glistened brightly when it passed light—to make his seat more comfortable and fingered over some large gray slabs.

"This looks like slate," he commented.

"Uh-huh. So it is," answered O'Toole interestedly. "And none of it goes to waste. Out of that ore you're a-sittin' on the smelter gets about ten per cent lead, about five per cent zinc, some three and a third ounces of silver per run, and—any amount of slate. That's minin'. It's not very often that we get a clear vein of silver like we struck to-day. It's just a sort of jack-of-all-trades business. You get all that old Mother Nature can offer and cash in on it—that is, if you know what's good for you, you don't get too particular with her, 'cause it won't do you no good."

They reached the elevator shaft then and the gang—nearly all of them, piled in. Soon they were winging their way through what, to Foster, seemed interminable distances through that dark shaft of darkness, passing yellow shelves of light at each level as they rose. The men joshed and made fun of each other as the car rapidly ascended. Then a

burst of gleaming white struck them. Foster closed his eyes, painfully, covered them with his arm.

"Blue sky," spoke O'Toole. "The 'Blue Sky Level.' You'll get used to it. Just take it easy at first."

Little by little Foster opened his eyes and made them accustomed to the brightness around him—and what brightness! They had come to an altogether new level which he had not seen before—at the top of the hill, and out of doors. It was a small opening at the crest of the hill.

"I'll take you down to the camp now," offered the crew foreman. "Show you where you'll sleep and eat while you're living at the mine."

"Good!" answered Foster—then his eyes seemed to be momentarily paralyzed as he stared before him.

A narrow road wound around the crest of the hill. There at its termination he saw the Allison limousine. Miss Allison was seated behind the steering wheel, but what caught his eye was the sight of Griffin, who had just stepped up and kissed the girl as she greeted him through the open door of the car. Foster, he could not explain why, felt an icy chill race down his spine on the sight. It was none of his affair—and yet—— Perhaps it was just that she was such an unusually charming girl and that he had formed such a distinct dislike for Griffin. Another car with several men carrying transits and theodolites had pulled up behind the Allisons'. Foster was just walking away with O'Toole when he heard a soft voice call:

"Oh, Mr. Foster! Mr. Foster! Please come here!"

SHE had seen him! He would have to go. He would have to stand there and make conversation with her and—Griffin! It was distasteful, but to O'Toole he said: "Please excuse me. I won't be gone but a moment."

O'Toole's face showed amazement and disappointment, but he nodded acknowledgment and waited. Foster hurried over to the Allison car. As he did so he saw Griffin look his way with a surly glare. He heard something said in an unpleasant tone by him about "hobnobbing with hirelings," saw the girl's face color and watched Griffin stamp angrily away. The girl thrust a slender, gloved hand through the limousine's door.

"It's good to see you again, Mr. Foster. And I'm *so* glad that you thought better of using my letter, and came to the mine."

Foster took the extended hand and accepted the warm handshake that he received. Ruddy cheeks, gay, laughing eyes, and golden blond hair—she was captivating. Foster felt his blood tingle as he absorbed the rich beauty of the girl before him.

"Well, thank you," parried Foster. Yet a kind of sadness touched him. The girl had disappointed him once. He didn't know—— He reached into his pocket thoughtfully, slowly, drew out her letter and handed it across. "You see, I like to stand on my own feet," he said. "Here is your letter. I did not use it, but thank you, just the same. It *was* thoughtful of you. Good-by."

The girl's chin dropped decidedly. Her lip trembled. She started to say something, but the words did not form themselves. Foster smiled whimsically and strode away. As he went to join O'Toole his eyes roved dreamily off over the sky line.

He was at the top of the mine hill. Far below him, in the west, the sun was sinking, a great molten ball of fire in a sapphire clear sky. The numberless lakes, now like mellow crucibles of orange lava, shimmered skyward. Brown leaves drifted here and there from the trees and the perfumed fragrance of the great North Woods forest was in the air; but Foster felt a strange loneliness creep over him.

"By the way," said O'Toole, "I was just thinking about something. See those instrument men over there with those transits, in that car?" He jerked a stubby thumb over his shoulder.

"Why—huh?" Foster snapped out of his reverie. The transit men? Oh, yes. "Why, yes, Mr. O'Toole, I saw them."

"Now I was just thinking of something that Griffin said to me down there in the tunnel. He said you were a navigator. Is that right?"

"Yes, I know navigation perfectly."

"Well, isn't there a close connection between navigation and surveying?"

"Yes, there is. Navigation, aside from seamanship, is practically surveying the ocean, as you voyage along. Surveying is—well, the same thing, as you travel along on land. Both are plane and spherical trigonometry to a large extent."

"Well, now! There you are, Foster! There's your job just as soon as you've been here long enough to establish your foothold, and prove your ability to stick, and that you are a willing and apt learner, and worker. Even Griffin probably had that in mind."

FOSTER had been dreaming, his mind drifting back toward a pair of jet-black eyes set in a blond-gold background, but O'Toole's last words brought him to realization of the topic. Foster laughed. It was a good-humored laugh.

"Mr. O'Toole," he said, "you are something like my grand old father—an altruist, I'm afraid. I certainly appreciate your thoughtful regard for me, and I admire you for thinking that perhaps Griffin had it in mind to give me an advance—some day. But I can't hold the same confidence in his liking for me enough to give me an advance, now or any time."

O'Toole shrugged his shoulders whimsically.

"Well, you know he doesn't like me, either, for that matter. But the mine has to go on, and men have to be advanced. In a way, he can hardly help himself."

They had rounded the peak of the hill now. Spread below them at their feet Foster glimpsed the great vistas of the mine buildings. There was the huge structure of the smelter with its great metal smokestacks jutting skyward and yellow, killing, sulphuric gases pouring from them. There were the long lines of conveyors working their way slowly, but almost humanly, from the top of the mine shaft down to the smelter itself; and the many buildings of the men's quarters stretching off here and there among the hills and valleys.

Snow, white, deep, and immense, covered everything. The whole—the mine, the smelter with its accompanying buildings, and the great North Woods in which it was set—was a mighty spectacle.

Foster felt something going on within himself, down deep. He couldn't have explained it had he tried. But he realized that his close relationship with the country there was having its effect on him. It was changing something in him. He looked with friendly warmth toward the drill-and-crew foreman beside him, stalwart Irishman that he was, and remarked:

"It's a great sight, Mr. O'Toole. Tremendous holdings that this Mr. Allison owns, aren't they?"

"Yes, indeed. There's only one larger in the whole of Canada. That's the Sullivan Mine. I used to work there, but the Kipawa does better in proportion right now. You see those long buildings over there to the south?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's our barracks, as we call 'em. That square building to the left, right alongside, is the mess shack. That's where we're going now—for a little grub. Come on! Let's hurry before the puddin's all gone!" he laughed.

NIGHT came, with its myriad showers of silver northern stars spangled over the heavens in wild disarray. From somewhere in the dim background of the miner's quarters came the low thrum of three or four guitars and deep, mellow voices raised in song. On the end of a long veranda that jutted out onto the prow of a snow-clad hill, two men sat, their pipes in hand, gazing off into those purple distances. Every now and then a great, long shaft of orange fire, or vermilion, or tawny yellow, would race across the starry dome overhead and then melt low on the horizon in astonishing splendor —the aurora borealis of the Northlands.

"Bright silver," murmured Foster. "Bright silver."

"Huh?" It was O'Toole speaking.

It was long after dinner, and the two men, having conversed for long, had sat in silence in that blessed enjoyment of brotherly friendship when silence so often speaks so much deper than do words.

"I was just thinking of a remark you made down there to-day, in the tunnel," said Foster. "I liked it very much. It brought a new note of something into my life—a something that I can't explain, and wouldn't want to attempt to explain. You know there come turning points in men's lives." Slowly, he was fingering the bright silver of his Spanish peseta in his pocket and thinking that he had been leaving too much to chance and fate. "Well, I'm reaching one of those forks in the road right now, O'Toole, that's all."

O'Toole was silent for a long time. Little blue clouds from his pipe curled peacefully skyward. Finally he said:

"Well, Foster, this great outdoors, and God's blue sky, whether it's by starlight, or sunlight, or aurora borealis, *will* do things to a man's soul—if man will but let it! There is a majesty and splendor here that brings out the best in a fellow, if he will only heed it. That's why I wonder sometimes how some cankered souls can go on and on the way they do up here, and not change."

Each man knew that the other was thinking of one particular individual, yet the beauty of the night somehow forbade the mentioning of any name or names. It was some time later that Foster knocked the red ashes from his pipe onto the rough-hewn rail of the veranda and stood to his feet. He was weary, very weary, but he was also a much happier man. As he bid good night to his newly found friend of the Northland, O'Toole put his hand on Foster's shoulder and said:

"Foster, you 'belong' with us here. You can make good in this game—if you only get a break. You have the stuff that is rare in men. I hope you get it, and if there is anything I can do at any time to help you, count on me."

"Thank you, O'Toole. I'll do my best to live up to your trust in me."

"Call me 'Mike,'" laughed O'Toole. "It's been a long time since I've been called by that name. Sometimes I get homesick to hear it."

"All right, Mike! And Mike it is!"

The laughter of two men drifted off on the wings of the night wind, and the white silences of the north closed over the great Kipawa Mines.

CHAPTER XII.
PERILOUS TRAILS.

A WEEK later Foster stood in the center of a long line of men in the pay shack, drawing his first week's wages. As he neared the cashier's window a tall, lanky individual passed him. He recognized the fellow as the old-timer he had first met in lower level No. 11, and the same who had sent him back to get a lamp for his hat, and a mask "if he wanted to collect his first week's wages." The tall miner stood before Foster for a moment counting his money, and grinned.

"So! I see you fooled 'em! You're collectin', eh? Well, it'll be easy going from now on. Good luck," he laughed.

"Thanks," acknowledged Foster. "I guess I might not be here, at that, if you hadn't tipped me off down there as you did."

The miner waved his pay check over his shoulder in farewell as he hurried out the shack. O'Toole passed him and gave him a sly wink of his eye.

"Be seein' yuh down at the mess shack, eh, Foster? We'll have to snaggle a coupla beers down at the square to-night."

"Right-o," smiled Foster.

Suddenly Foster felt a strange intuitive feeling of something, or somebody watching him. He looked up with a rather annoyed feeling. Griffin! Sitting across the room on a big packing case, talking with Larkin, he had been watching Foster all along. Foster went up to the counter, drew his pay envelope and turned off to retrace his steps to the barracks, when a voice called bluntly:

"Hey, Foster! Come over here!" It was Griffin.

Before he looked up, Foster recognized the voice, harsh and thick. He walked over coolly to Griffin.

"Yes?" he inquired.

Griffin pulled out a cigarette and looked at Foster with a diffident stare. As he lighted his cigarette, his fingers trembled considerably. Griffin tossed the match into the corner. Men were passing with their pay checks. Several noticed him standing there and all near were interested.

"O'Toole tells me that you're getting *good* down there on the lower shelf." There was a peculiar sting to Griffin's words, as though it was something intangible to cope with. "I didn't think you'd be here—to-day. So I've decided to give you a break, to graduate you from the shelf to the smelter, to give you a responsible job."

Griffin's eyes roved over Foster analytically. There was a strange tensity in the air; Foster felt its brittleness. He liked it down there in the tunnel, now, with O'Toole. Still, what could he say? Griffin placed the men where he wanted them, and, promotion was—promotion.

"All right," answered Foster, rather stolidly. "Thanks."

Griffin flecked the ashes from his cigarette hurriedly.

"Report there, to me, in the morning, at smelter No. 6. That's all."

Foster turned on his heel and walked thoughtfully out the pay shack. Griffin's new offer somehow bothered him. Perhaps he had Griffin wrong. Was he really trying to help him, after all?—he wondered. It didn't sound just plausible and yet, and yet it was *possible*. Perhaps, under his harsh manner, he was going to help him—give him a break, as he called it.

At the barracks, while Foster and O'Toole were dressing to go down to Godrich to spend the evening together, the new man confided in that stanch Irishman's philosophy. O'Toole listened with grave face.

"I hardly know what to say," he replied finally. "I spoke to Griffin about you on two separate occasions, but I suggested that he break you in on theodolite work, surveying. You'd get a good salary on that later, with real advancement. But this, this smelter idea—I can't imagine what that is, unless it's something to do with the checking end. That's on bar silver—I mean, when the silver bar ingots are shipped to the mint. It's the most responsible work there is at the smelter, but it has no future."

O'Toole brushed his overcoat.

"But take it easy, Foster. Take it easy. You never know what Griffin is up to."

Foster nodded thoughtfully.

"I'll do that, as far as I'm able. Well, we go—eh, Mike?"

"Yep-ee! Now for the village—and a little whoopee!"

MORNING found Foster down in the valley at the smelter platform awaiting Griffin. The great blast furnaces were roaring out their throaty bursts of flame and yellow smoke.

The long devil's hoes raked the glowing fires that fed them. From everywhere came the clang of machinery and the din of a great organization working at full tilt.

The long conveyors from the mine beyond were already drawing down the precious ore that fed those gaping blast furnaces that smelted down the ore into liquid metal and the liquid metal into silver, and the silver into shaped ingots for shipment.

He caught sight of Griffin. He was standing talking to four men at the edge of the freight platform. A short freight train was drawing in at a rapid pace beside them. "Probably arranging a shipment," was Foster's passing thought. Then he saw Griffin point his way.

Foster's eyes were attracted by several red-coated Mounted Policemen, then. Snappy, fine-looking fellows with a proud, splendid bearing, was his conclusion as he watched them pass him in the bright morning sun. They were everywhere, these efficient, gayly dressed upholders of the law.

"Foster!"

He flung about. Griffin was calling him. Hurrying up the platform, he reached the mine superintendent.

"Mr. Foster, this is Mr. Wendell," he introduced the broad-shouldered man at his side. "Wendell will acquaint you with your new duties. For the time being you will operate one of these electric trucks transporting bar silver from the smelter to the trucks, or to the waiting freight cars out there."

Griffin fumbled his hands through his pockets, hunched up his big chinchilla overcoat, and looked rather worriedly, Foster thought, from Wendell to himself.

"All right," answered Foster. "I'm all ready."

"Just a minute, Foster," halted Griffin. "There's one piece of instruction that comes from me. Get this and get it straight. You're running these electric trams. But remember this: each one of them is filled with silver ingots, and each one of these cars is in your care while you are running it. There's several thousand dollars' worth of silver in your hands. You're responsible for the safe delivery of each tram. If anything happens to any of them—it's your little neck behind bars—again!" There was venom in the last word.

Foster felt the hot blood jump to his veins, his face flush, and his fists clench. Griffin would go too far one of these days. That tongue of his, he would have to swallow it, if he continued with statements like that!

"I guess you know that you can trust me, or you wouldn't have brought me here," said Foster calmly. "But, if you want me to work for you, you'll have to retain your personal insults to your private thoughts. One more crack like that out of you and I'm through—after we've settled!"

Griffin's eyes opened to the size of ostrich eggs. He stared at Foster incredulously.

"W-what?" he stammered. "Say! It's only by the grace of hell that you're working here at all. You'll hold *your* tongue or I'll—I'll fire you!" There was a strange hesitancy in his voice, however. Then he laughed a curious, hollow laugh. "That's all right, Foster!" he laughed again sardonically. "Forget it. I lose my temper now and then. Get to work!"

FOSTER swept off disgustedly. How could any red-blooded man, he asked himself, work for a beast like Griffin? He wanted to rub it in, eh, about the jail affair? After what had happened! The injustice of

it galled him. One of these days, he warned himself, he and Griffin would have a show-down.

"This way!" It was Wendell speaking. "Here's your car. No. 3652. You check her in over there at the tram garage across the tracks every night and morning. Any repairs needed, you report 'em at night."

He went over the mechanism of the operation, then.

"Now you go down there to the west end of the smelting storeroom. You see those big ingots going through?" He pointed to a stack of bright silver that was piled at the end of the towering smelter foundry yard, inside.

"Yes."

"You check in there. You pick up twenty-five ingots on each load. You check them. It's your responsibility. You sit behind your tram. You watch your ingots, and you get them safely into your freight car, or truck out there on the platform. Here's your brass chit for your pay. That's all. Hop to it!"

Foster hopped to it. He stepped on the lever of his electric tram and headed for the ingots. The work commenced. He picked up his twenty-five bright silver bars and carefully counted them as the handlers, a man on each end, loaded them into his tram. From there he ran his powerful little car out onto the freight platform and unloaded them there into a big government truck. Other trams, he noted, were unloading into freight cars at the edge of the platform.

The work was simple. It wasn't long before he was joshing and making friends with the other tram operators, and the work was running along smoothly. All of the men operating the trucks, or trams, were young men like himself, under thirty. It was responsible work, any one could see that, but at the same time Foster felt a decided sense of disappointment in his change of employment.

The work down in the mine had been gripping and glamorous. At almost every moment he had been learning something new and interesting. O'Toole partly helped to make it so, but that was real, man's work. This—well, this was monotonous.

If this was advancement, it seemed a peculiar kind of advancement. Certainly it didn't take any brains to check out twenty-five bars of silver—it might as well have been bread loaves, for that matter—and deliver them to a waiting government truck. Aside from his passing pleasantries with a Mountie now and then, or a traveling fellow tram operator, the work was ghastly.

It was shortly after lunch when Foster hooked onto a new stack of ingots. They seemed to be of a somewhat superior mold to the others he had been carrying. He was waiting a moment at the checking-out table for his receipts when he saw Griffin watching him from the platform of one of the great blast furnaces. Foster thought little of it. Griffin was anywhere, everywhere, at any time.

The tram was loaded.

"This one to the east platform," ordered Wendell. "A special car will take these."

Foster nodded, jabbed down his foot power lever and rattled out toward the east platform. He swerved around the end of the big steel columns at the end of the smelter and out into the bright sunlight. A dull-blue closed car, he noted, was waiting there for him. He headed for it. It was the far tip of the train platform. A train was starting down the track toward him.

THE heavy car that waited before him suddenly swung up to the edge of the platform. With a bright flash two red-coated Mounted Policemen then leaped up over the edge of the end of the platform. On the instant the big blue car, with a roaring

blast of power, shot off into the trees. Two Mounted Policemen dashed unexpectedly around the end of the smelter. Pistol shots rang out. Foster saw the Mounties firing after the disappearing car. Two gaping blue barrels of .45s rushed at him from the hands of two Mounties.

"That's him! That's the jailbird!" It was Griffin, shouting.

Foster looked up, startled, and leaped back off the small metal seat of his tram. Wendell and Griffin were tearing down the platform toward him. In a flash the realization swept over him. In agonized astonishment he stared into the brace of .45s before him. It was impossible, unbelievable, and yet—there they were, there he was!

"Cover the end tram coming out!" snapped the first Mountie to his comrade. "I'll take care of this crook."

Sickening indignation swept over Foster. A sudden, flaming desire for revenge surged up within him. He had been framed. But, by the gods, he had had enough! He was ready for fight! They wouldn't trap him into any jail again, not without a struggle. His mind was working like lightning. His wits had been sharpened during the past few weeks.

Griffin dashed out onto the platform. The Mountie turned a fraction of a foot, still covering Foster. The train was opposite the platform now, rushing along at a good speed. Could he make it? Would it cost him his life if he attempted it? The Mounted! They were good, and he knew it, but he was desperate. Wendell was right behind Griffin.

There came a gray streak through the dark. Foster had leaped straight out for the open door of a rushing freight car. The Mountie's pistol flipped up. His pistol crashed into the clear morning. There came a wild scream from the freight. A redcoat spurted across the platform, firing as he ran.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

IN a driving hurtle Foster slithered over the rough floor boards of the rushing freight car. Something hot and painful seared into his right hip, and thudded off into the boards beside him.

He rolled across the floor, his head crashing into the beam on the opposite side of the thundering, rolling car. Flashing lights and dark shadows danced crazily before his bewildered eyes.

He lay quietly, against the booming wall of the car. His thoughts were tumbling in on him wildly. That Mountie! How fast he had been on the trigger! He, Foster, was lucky to have escaped with his life. He moved that numbed leg of his questioningly. Yes, it worked—but the pain! The Mounted! They were bad men to cross swords with. His mind throbbed and tumbled in thought.

Once more he was a fugitive from justice. And this time from the organization that he least wanted to have any trouble with. He could feel warm blood trickling down his trouser leg. What would he do? He would need medical aid. How would he get it without being discovered? Where was the train going? Well, what did it matter? What a jumble life had been these past few weeks! What strange experiences had been his—all because he had once been duped by fate into taking the wrong train! One never knew *where* life would lead.

Hatred for Griffin surged within him. What a yellow-hearted, treacherous devil he had developed into! The fires of Griffin's scheming, he figured, had been brightened by the attentions paid to Foster by Miss Allison. Funny about her, too. They had met but a few times, still he couldn't somehow drive her from his thoughts. But now, what would she think of him? And good old Mike

O'Toole! They would, with the aid of Griffin, have him down for a common criminal—a thief!

The thought revolted him. What was worse, he would doubtless face a trial, and probably jail, if he was caught. The odds were against him, too, he knew that. How could he ever escape the Mounted? Who ever had, for long? Their fine-tooth combs penetrated every part of that great wooded North. Perhaps, after all, he had made a foolish move. Possibly it would have been better to have stayed and fought it out? By leaving he had, naturally, incriminated himself, made it appear that he was surely guilty. Yet he knew that there was a rugged "frame" against him when the Mounted could have been convinced that he was a suspicious character who needed watching.

For several hours the train rattled on. He was becoming weakened from loss of blood. He crawled to one edge of the door and peered out. White, white snow! A few trees here and there, now and again Indian cabins—but always that unending, blinding white, again challenging him, mocking him. Would he lose his fight?

The first thing that would happen, he knew, would be that the stations of the railroad would be advised of his presence on the train, and the train watched for and searched. He would have to get off some place—any place, at his very first opportunity.

The heavy and resonant drone of the locomotive whistle shrieked down the clear morning air from time to time. It was getting overcast overhead, but the air was crisp and clear.

The thunder of the rolling train began to lessen. It was coming to a stop.

Foster struggled to the open door and peered furtively up ahead. The wind cut into his cheeks and brought a stream of tears to his eyes. It was getting colder. The terrain was becoming more wooded now. He was glad of that. There was no sign of any station up ahead. But the train *was* slowing. There was no doubt of that. He couldn't afford to take any chances on remaining on, longer. His eyes danced back and forth over the passing landscape close to the tracks. If he could only find a deep snowdrift. One never knew by looking at them whether they were high packs of snow, or merely rocks, or points of earth with a thin coating of snow over them. No time!

His hip aching and moist with the deep bullet wound in his side, Foster backed off from the door, stood on his toes and made a running leap through it, aiming for a great pile of white that swept careeningly past the open door of the rumbling freight car. He felt himself hurtling through the air. His head plunged through the white, cool snow. Crash! His skull struck something, his shoulder felt as though it was caught in a crushing press. Dull, shadowy darkness swept slowly over his fighting senses.

WITH a struggling effort Foster endeavored, some time later, to open his eyes. He was as hot as fire all over. Was he frozen? Where was he? He worked his eyelids apart. Then he stared.

There *was* a wall before him. It was a crude, roughly boarded wall. It was red, all red. But slowly it began to take on a grayer hue. Then he realized: it was his eyes. They were red and bloodshot. His body burned as though it were on fire.

Some one, he figured, had picked him up. Perhaps the Mounted. A broad-jowled face, bronzed and kindly, moved strangely before him. He blinked his eyes curiously.

An Indian! That was what he was, an Indian. Foster had been picked up and dragged into a hut. He tried to pull himself to an upright position.

He couldn't. Was he bound? No, he guessed not. It was just his numbed body refusing to work. He made a strong effort to talk, to move his lips. But they, too, seemed numbed, without control. He had been frozen?

"No talk. No talk. Rest." It was the old Indian speaking.

Foster nodded, but wondered. He must tell that Indian something, warn him.

"The—the—M-Mounted!" he uttered the words thickly. "D-don't t-te-ll the Mount——"

The broad-shouldered Indian placed his fingers over the Foster's trembling lips. There was a kindly, almost sad smile playing around the bronze lips.

"No, white man. I will not tell the Mounted. You are safe. Rest."

Vaguely, Foster thought back. He must have struck his head against a rock or very hard, frozen ground. He suddenly felt very sleepy. His head felt as though it would split with the pressure; his hip, his body ached, burned, burned, the heat was consuming him, making him drowsy. Sleep—he could not stave it off. He felt the old Indian's hand on his forehead, heard a strange, murmuring chant. Good old Indian—good old In——

IT was several days later that Foster could have been seen sitting, snugly wrapped in warm, woolly Indian blankets, behind a cabin in a quiet North-woods forest.

Bright sunlight played over his face and gave new health to his frayed-out body and mind. Little clouds of steam swept off from his face as he breathed peacefully and contentedly there in the seclusion of the little Indian settlement.

Foster reached for two sticks of crotched branches used as crutches that rested beside the cabin wall. Drawing them to him he slipped them under his armpits and threw his weight on them.

Whistling under his breath he ambled around the sides of the cabin and stared up at the bright skies. Then from the distance he heard footsteps crunching, crunching through the soft snow. Some one was coming! Who? As instructed by the old Indian, he hobbled in toward the cabin and out of sight until he could determine, from the window, who was approaching. He didn't want to be trapped, unaware, at least. Then there came a low, clearly trilled cry identical to that of a quail. Foster laughed, flung around in his tracks and waited.

Soon a massive figure in tawny brown lumberman's shirt and old khaki pants appeared through the trees. A broad, happy smile played over the sharp Indian features of his bronzed face. Over his shoulder he was carrying a sleek and fat little deer. He dropped it with a thud to the ground at Foster's feet.

"Hello, Tuscolah-friend!" greeted Foster.

"There, White Brother," said Tuscolah-friend, "is a fine fat dinner for us to-night. You like?"

"Sure. You bet I like," answered Foster. "Boy! He's a beauty. Where'd you get him?"

"Yonder. In forest. Trap."

"Oh, you trapped him, eh, Tuscolah-friend?"

"Yum."

The Indian set about to clean the deer, slitting the sleek little body down the belly with his sharp hunting knife, cutting off the legs and laying back the hide. The clear, pink fresh meat was quartered off against the lush white snow.

"How feel hip? Good? Bad?"

"The hip is just hunky-dory. Don't you worry about that hip."

"To-night put new packing. Fresh herbs. Soon all well."

"Any guests to-night? I mean Indian guests, Tuscolah-friend?" That was the name that the old Indian had related to Foster during his first days in the "dark" forest. Foster liked it.

"Yum. Istulosa of the Wyandottes. He come. Bring fine Indian daughter see you, too. To-night full moon."

"Full moon, eh? That means you hunt?"

"Yum. Soon I take you on moonlight hunt, too. You like—ver' much, white brother."

Foster stared at the stalwart shoulders of the Indian for several moments. Tuscolah-friend somehow seemed to carry him back across the centuries in dreams, back to a day when the great Hudson Bay country did not know the smoke of mining smelters, or the flying cinders of the locomotive and its screeching wail through the white nights. Those, he mused, were days of romance.

Every now and then Tuscolah-friend would look toward Foster with apprehensive, watchful eyes, as if those eyes seemed to say: "You are a very fine friend here now, and I enjoy your fine companionship, friend; but one of these days you will leave me and then I will be more lonely than I ever was before."

IT was a strange comradeship that had thrown these two men together in a lonely spot of the Canadian North Woods—this young man and the old Indian who had jerked him from the jaws of death and watched over not only with medicines but by the light of the stars—with a rifle. Why, who could say? Tuscolah-friend had told Foster that he hated all white men—except him. But he had found Foster on a sacred Indian day and on a day when he was very lonely in his desolated little cabin where he trapped and cut airplane spruce to be collected once a month by the white man in his big canopied truck. Foster watched Tuscolah-friend clean the deer, interestedly.

"Tuscolah-friend," said Foster suddenly, "I wonder why you did all this for me? Eh? You don't like white men. I am a white man. I have been only a great worry, and a great deal of work and responsibility to you. Why do you do all this for me?"

The old Indian kept right on working as though he had not heard. Very casually he replied:

"Yum! You are a lot of worry. Yum. You make me work a great deal. But you are a ver' true friend. First day I see you jump from train, I say: That rare white man. He have great courage. It sacred Indian day; that be good omen. I ver' lonely. Then I pick you up—like small boy, ver' pale, ver' weak an' ver' worry. I probe him bullet. Not once you jump. Not once cry out. Ver' brave Indian fella. And have face of fine shape. Shape like Indian chieftain my tribe—Tuscarora! The Mounted man look for you. Mounted man my enemy. One time kill my brother. I like kill Mounted man but Mounted man ver' power'f' in Canada forest—more power'f' than snow and gale, I think."

Tuscolah-friend threw the deer over on its back and slipped off the skin like a small coat, with deft, practised fingers that made Foster look on with great admiration.

"Yes," said Foster slowly, "that's right. The Mounted is very powerful in Canada. And I am afraid for you, Tuscolah-friend, if I am found here in your cabin. They will arrest you and put you in jail. And jail, Tuscolah-friend, would kill you—you who have lived like the birds in the forest with the blue sky always over your head."

"Yum. But Tuscolah-friend never go to jail. Tuscolah-friend first put bullet in own head—after put in head of Mounted. Great-grandfather in Tuscorora once tell me: 'Bullet in head much better than head in jail.' But White Brother, never use bad word, 'afraid.' I no like hear him word."

Foster nodded, and smiled.

"Tuscolah-friend, I have never been afraid, myself. I am only afraid for some one else."

"Yum. Ver' good. White brother have heart big like full moon, I think, but never be 'fraid for Tuscolah-friend —he only ver' poor Indian. His life no matter."

"Say, you big war horse," laughed Foster, "where do you get that stuff? You matter plenty. And look at all the good friends you have—the Wyandottes and your own Tuscaroras. Why, they all think that there's no one—even in Indian heaven—half so fine as you!"

Tuscolah-friend laughed merrily. He had quartered the deer and laid out all the parts. Some of them he took, then, and hung them up to dry, under the eaves of his cabin. The rest he carried into the cabin and laid on the stove. Then he built a roaring fire in his crude little iron stove and made things ready for lunch.

"Need any help?" shouted Foster from the cabin yard.

"No! Tuscolah no need help from crippled white man. Him stay outside. Get medicine sunlight."

CHAPTER XIV.
A STRANGER IN CAMP.

A MONTH had passed. It was a morning in late December. There had not been much snowfall, on the whole, so far that month. It had been good for Tuscolah-friend's spruce-cutting activities whereby the faithful old Indian earned his livelihood.

This morning two bright-edged adzes were ringing with the clang of sharp steel. Foster, in thick lumberman's shirt, and patched trousers, swung his thick-handled adze deftly back and forth and "barked" the slick-trunked spruce that protruded from between his feet. His wound had completely healed, thanks to the native herbs applied by Tuscolah-friend, and thanks to long nights of peaceful sleep and day after day of rigorous, out-of-door exercise.

The muscles on Foster's shoulders, back, and arms stood out like sinewy steel cables flexing under his skin. As he worked and swung the great adz ringingly at his feet he felt the great joy of living close to Nature.

He drew in great wholesome gulps of the morning air as he swung, and whistled between his teeth in the exultant pleasure of teeming health. It was good, this being here in the rugged forest, feeling one's muscles getting stronger and more mellow day by day, and one's grayness and dimness leaving the mind like cobwebs swept from a sooty room and leaving it as fresh and clear.

Hunting was one of the joyous delights that Tuscolah-friend and his white brother indulged in by night, unafraid of the searching eyes of the white man from civilization. It was on one of these most gorgeous of moonlight nights that Foster stood at the brink of a tall hill, whitecapped with snow. Tuscolah-friend said:

"Hush, White Brother! Did you hear?"

Foster grinned. The old Indian always heard the notes of the forest, but Foster never heard them.

"No, Tuscolah-friend, I heard nothing. And I think that you are having a moonlight dream."

The old Indian grunted in friendly disgust. As he had promised Foster, he had taken him hunting this night with bow and arrow, to show him how the wild animals were brought down in the days of story and legend, in the days of the forefathers of Tuscolah-friend. The stalwart Indian motioned to his white brother.

"Watch. Follow me!"

FOSTER watched and followed. In admiration he saw Tuscolah-friend's sleek back bend low along the trail. His sandaled feet, like the soft pads of a tiger's, patted along the trail in utter silence. He was like

an animal, wary, cunning, and with a sharper intellect than the animals, thought Foster, as he watched.

"Hush!"

Foster stopped up short. A twig crackled under his ungainly feet in the forest silences. Tuscolah-friend threw another warning glance his way. Would the white brother never learn to master his awkward feet? Would he always have to make noise in the hunt? Why were his feet so clumsy, like all white men's? Tuscolah-friend drew his bow up to his shoulder. Foster saw the long arrow go into its place. Then a musical *tw-ang!* through the night. A low whistle of the speeding arrow.

Thunderous crashing sounded through the heavy underbrush. Foster stiffened and stared. Up to the moment he had seen nothing. Then he caught the sight through the moonlight of silver and platinum. A great stag struggled forward, staggered and then dropped over onto his knees, his massive antlers drooping over his rippling shoulders. Foster marveled.

They went over then, and Tuscolah-friend cut a great bough from a tree and with heavy thongs from his belt made strong lashings around the legs. The big animal was then slung across the bough. The heavy antlers and the insides of the stag had been removed to lighten it.

"White-Brother-Friend take one end stick!" said the Indian.

"Sure."

The big stag was then carried off and down the trail to the Indian's hut, and the hunt for that night was over.

THE following day Foster sat before the open doorway of the Indian's cabin. "To-night comes the truck to collect the spruce, Tuscolah-friend, no?"

"Yum. To-night. But White-Brother-Friend must not be seen. He must stay behind cabin walls."

"Yes," nodded Foster thoughtfully. For a moment he straightened, rested between his knees the adz that he had been using, and stared away, dreamily through the blue sky that cut like a sapphire mosaic through the trees beyond. Blue sky! Blue sky—— His fancy drifted back to a face he remembered—jet-black eyes set against a velvet skin and golden-blond hair at Blue Sky Level. The great Kipawa Mines. Old Mike O'Toole——

Tuscolah-friend appeared to be working feverishly, but intently and closely he was really studying his white brother from the corners of his eyes. He shook his head then, hopelessly as realization of Foster's far-off expression revealed his inner thoughts.

Through the long winter nights, either by the little glowing stove in the cabin, or, on warmer nights, by a camp fire in the forest, they had talked. Foster had opened up the sepulchre of his heart to old Tuscolah-friend. They had become as brothers of the forest.

Foster knew that the old Indian was keeping strangers from the camp. He didn't know, however, how many strangers he had kept from the place. Nor did he know of the Mounted. It was strange about them, why they hadn't found him. Perhaps Tuscolah-friend had thrown them off the scent, too. Whenever Foster had asked his bronze-skinned benefactor about the Mounted, the old Indian had replied:

"Tuscolah-friend a Tuscarora. Tuscaroras tell nothing to white man. Tuscolah-friend tell nothing to white man. Tuscolah-friend tell lies to Mounted—if Mounted come!"

Foster would stare at Tuscolah-friend analytically, then. He never knew whether the Indian was trying to throw him off the scent, too. He was a subtle old fox. He felt that the Indian was trying to keep any worries from him, and to say nothing that would recall to mind the white man's world. No doubt

the Mounted had searched that region for him, too—but so much time had elapsed. It was strange, that. He wished that Tuscolah-friend wouldn't keep everything from him.

Night brought callers at Tuscolah-friend's forest cabin. The stars were hung in the sky and a great full moon rode the silvery roadway when there came a trill through the trees beyond the gleaming cabin lights. Tuscolah-friend dropped the big steel rifle he was cleaning and walked out under the stars, trilling back his native call to his Indian brothers. A tall, slender Indian strode into the light behind the cabin. Right after him walked his wife and daughter, a pretty little Indian girl of some seventeen years. It was not the first time that they had been to the cabin while Foster was there.

"It is Istulosa, of the Wyandottes!" called Tuscolah-friend. "Come out, White Brother!"

FOSTER came out of the seclusion of the cabin then, to the environs of the forest that surrounded the little camp. Tuscolah-friend built a fire on the usual spot with broken twigs and branches that he always kept handy. And on this night, as on many other nights, Foster talked on and on into the night, with his Indian brothers, listening to their wholesome philosophy and learning new words of the Tuscarora vocabulary.

In the distances beyond the treetops he could see the saw-toothed ridges of towering mountains blotting out the stars and cutting a sharp line across the lower flamings of the great aurora borealis that was always with them. In silence he would sit there, often hours at a time, smoking the old pipe that Tuscolah-friend had given him, and using the old Indian's tobacco. The powerful majesty of the North woods, a certain quality in the air, in the skies, in the goodness of the very food he ate, all had brought a new life into Foster's blood. His body was new, his mind was changed. He was not, he knew, the same man who had leaped aboard the flying freight from the Kipawa Mines. He was a better, and stronger, man.

As they talked that night beside the glowing embers of the dying camp fire, Foster noticed that the little Indian girl several times moved closer his way. She liked him, he knew that. Foster, however, always moved at the same time—away. Tuscolah-friend noticed it with a sad look drifting over his eyes. Kuchimba was a beautiful little Indian girl and Foster enjoyed talking with her, and talking with her father; but always, always in the distance there loomed the brightness of another face.

That night, after Istulosa and Kuchimba had gone, old Tuscolah-friend gazed at Foster a long time over the scarlet lights of the camp fire that glowed warmly into the faces of both. Foster had been uneasy, restive, impatient. The feeling had been growing and increasing for days. Tuscolah-friend finally said:

"White-Brother-Friend, you happy here?"

"Yes," answered Foster. "I am very happy, only—only—— Well, Tuscolah-friend, you see, I left some good friends behind me, too. I often wonder what they think of me. I believe sometimes, Tuscolah-friend, that they are forced to think that I am a coward for running away. You know we both hate cowards."

The Indian smoked his pipe in long, aspirated puffings for some minutes. Finally he answered:

"Yum."

Followed another long silence. The Indian was becoming very thoughtful. Foster could see that. Several moments later the old Indian said:

"You have a heartache, White Brother. That is bad for health, bad

for brain, bad for happiness. Great-grandfather Tuscarora say: 'Him heart never break. Him heart only ache and ache, when trouble come. Heartache worse for health than poison arrow. Him heartache no medicine man cure.' Tuscolah-friend very sad to-night. Him want White-Brother-Friend never leave."

Tuscolah-friend rose.

"Come, White Brother. We sleep now. To-morrow Tuscolah-friend must go to white man's camp to get money for spruce. To-morrow White-Brother-Friend must keep sharp watch, alone."

Foster looked up quickly. He had thought that the Indian was to be paid for the spruce right from the truck that collected the timber. He somehow recalled that Tuscolah-friend some time previously had told him that. He wondered why Tuscolah-friend had said that, wondered why he would leave.

"Perhaps," said Foster reflectively, "perhaps I never shall leave you, Tuscolah-friend. Perhaps I shall never be able to return to the white man's land. But you are like one of my own family, now, Tuscolah-friend."

Foster, however, had reached a crisis with himself. Would he always have to go on and on as a fugitive, as a forest native, cut off from his friends and his family, from every one? No, he told himself. One of these days he would not be able to stand it longer. Then he would return, whatever the penalty, whatever the cost. Perhaps, though, in time he would be able to clear the country and get quietly home.

THE following day Foster awoke to find that Tuscolah-friend had already slipped out of bed. He could smell and hear the coffee simmering on the fire that the Indian had so thoughtfully left for him.

During that day Foster kept to the interior of the cabin. He read old magazines that he found there, mostly, and for the rest of the time sat in dreaming, staring out the little cabin window lost in thought, in reverie on what would happen, and of the strange fortunes that had been his. Sunset came and with the last scarlet rays of the dying sun Foster began to become apprehensive about Tuscolah-friend. Where had he gone? What queer mission, perhaps, had he taken on that day of days—the first time that they had been absent from each other through an entire day.

He was sitting in the silences of the dark, with only the glow of his pipe lighting the rude ceiling of the little cabin, when he was startled to hear that strange trill of his friend's. Or was it the Wyandotte? He laid his pipe down quietly on the table, walked stealthily to the window and peered out. Across the snows sprinkled with moonlight and the gray shadows of the tall pines he saw the old Indian, then, pushing across on his snowshoes toward the cabin. Foster flung the door back.

"Tuscolah-friend! What happened, you old war horse?"

The Indian dropped several bundles of food onto the top of the stove. His face was wreathed in happy smiles. There seemed to be a livelier, a new step, to his gait. He smiled his strange smile which never seemed to efface itself.

"Why all these joyous grins? What has happened?" laughed Foster.

Tuscolah-friend gazed on Foster with affection.

"Yum!" he smiled. "You are still impatient. The forest has not yet taught you patience. Tell me, why does the white man always want to know everything, at once? Patience is the law of the forest, in trapping, in fishing, in hunting, in mating, in the growth of the forest—it is all patience. You have not learned it, yet?"

Foster shrugged his shoulders with a whimsical gesture. Then he smiled.

"Very well, Tuscolah-friend. Pa-

tience it is, then. I guess I do learn too slowly."

"Some things," answered Tuscolah-friend, "must be learned slowly."

THEY went outside as soon as the Indian had placed away the parcels, and built a roaring camp fire in their clearing. Bending over their pipes, they smoked for a time in silence. Through it all Foster felt that a peculiar change had come over Tuscolah-friend. He wondered about it. Suddenly the old Indian placed his hand on Foster's knee. Foster looked up. He had been dreaming again, dreaming of a face, old memories—and of a day on Blue Sky Level. He saw fanciful visions from time to time in the fire. He had been fire-gazing again. He stared up at Tuscolah-friend curiously.

"White-Brother-Friend——" the stalwart Indian began in a low tone, then paused. Foster was quick to catch the trembling in the usually resonant and deep voice.

"Say, you big chipmunk!" admonished Foster. "What's gotten into you to-night, anyway?"

The Indian pointed over his shoulder, and at the same moment he pushed the twigs at his feet and stirred up the fire so that its glow brightened quickly. Foster looked behind into the shadows, but he did not have to look far to see what Tuscolah-friend was pointing at. Foster stiffened. Strange, icy chills raced down his spine. He grabbed Tuscolah-friend's hand and stared with wide, incredulous eyes. It had been long since he had set eyes on human beings! On a great felled log he saw, silhouetted against the dancing firelights, the figure of a girl, alone, looking Foster's way with smiling eyes.

"Tuscolah-friend! A girl! Look!"

The Indian nodded understandingly.

"Yum. White man girl."

In a flash, realization swept over Foster. The Indian had brought her. That was what had at first made him so gay, and later so sad. That was the cause of his mission among the hated white men. Foster stood up. The girl remained motionless.

"Tuscolah-friend, what has happened? You—you brought this girl?"

"Yum. I bring."

Foster pushed past the old Indian, through the snow, and up to the girl dressed in white furs and high leather boots.

To be concluded in the September issue, out August 5th.

AN ADVENTUROUS SOUL

WHAT writer would not give anything to be along with Frank Curtis, of Seattle, as he fares north to Alaska to search for sunken treasure near Juneau? His objective and plans read like a fiction story. Back in the gold rush days, the *Islander*, a steamer, went to the bottom in Stevens Pass, and the story goes that her hull holds a fabulous cargo of ore valued between three hundred thousand and three million dollars. Mr. Curtis is armed with a diving bell and other necessary equipment. He will work from a barge. He is doing what we all dream of doing. Give him a cheer!

A Cold-blooded, Ruthless Killer—and yet the Order Was: "Don't Shoot Him!"

WANTED ALIVE!

By SEAN O'LARKIN

I WANT Hoff—and I want him alive!" the police commissioner said fiercely. "The papers are out to break the administration over this case. Of course, I know we're up against it. We've done our best, but Hoff has beaten us at every turn. We haven't been able to so much as lay a finger on him. And he's a law unto himself!"

Chief Inspector Brady nodded grimly.

"He's cost us five men to date. Three he riddled with bullets and two he bribed. But why do you want him alive, commissioner? That's a stiff order. He gives no quarter. Why should we?"

"I want him alive to make an example of him," the commissioner growled. "And I want to redeem the honor of the department in the eyes of the public. They haven't quite gotten over Slater's and Gorley's dirty trick—letting Hoff buy them off. The two of them are in Europe now, enjoying his filthy blood money. And he's shot down Cassidy, Thomas, and Snyder——"

"And he'll kill more of our boys—if we're to get him alive!"

"But we must do just that, inspector. I insist. Don't you see that if you corner him and fill him full of lead, the papers'll say the department silenced him, fearing exposures at a trial. I mean to put Hoff on trial, convict him and send him to the chair—and let him shoot off his mouth all he damn pleases.

I want to let the public know that if we've got weak sisters on the force, at least the department as a whole is clean and above corruption. We've got to make an example of this gangster who plays a lone wolf's game or take a beating at the next election!"

Inspector Brady shook his head doubtfully. "I'm still thinking of the cost, the bloodshed, of getting him. It'll take a tough man to bring Hoff in alive!"

"The cost be damned!" the commissioner blazed. "Hoff has taken his toll of life and property in this city. We can lay eleven shootings to him. And three of them were our own men. But I want him alive because I don't want any one to say that we cops shot him down to avenge the deaths of three brother cops! I mean to give him over to the law—to let its process put the fear of God into him—before he's burned."

"He'll never let himself be taken alive."

"That's *his* idea! But you've got to beat him, inspector. I want Hoff punished as only conviction and execution can punish a man. Killing him too soon is letting him off easily. I want him to languish in the death house, watching others go to the death chamber, waiting his turn, eating his heart out with fear. It's the only way we can make him pay the bill!"

Inspector Brady was a bit taken aback by the commissioner's bloodthirsty philosophy. Yet as a case-hardened old copper, he could readily see the point. If he had his way, he'd have Hoff drawn and quartered. Cassidy, whom the gangster had slain, had been his buddy.

The commissioner briefly recapitulated Hoff's career of crime. As a member of the South Side gas-house gang, Hoff stayed in the background when that notorious body pulled its jobs. He was younger in those days and seemed to be serving an apprenticeship in robbery and murder. Then the gang was broken up and Hoff, escaping the dragnet, went to cover.

THE city thought it was well rid of him, even at the cost of his freedom, till a year ago when he turned up, playing a lone hand. He had no mob to work with him, no accomplices. He turned his own tricks with an amazing cunning, and there was no one who could be reached by the police to make him squeal. The gangster staged pay-roll holdups in broad daylight through the simple expedient of shooting down the money carriers instead of robbing them while they had their hands in the air.

Twice the police were on his heels. He sailed too close to capture in the timing of his crimes, and eyewitnesses of his highwaymanism set up a hue and cry. In the chases that ensued, the three policemen named lost their lives under Hoff's retorts of hot lead.

Then, somehow, Slater and Gorley got wind of his hide-out. They went to him, probably cornered him, and could have taken him alive to pay the score he owed society. But he was cunning. He bargained with them and bought them off, and, wearing their disgrace lightly, they fled the country.

Thus Hoff was still at large, a merciless killer and a clever crook. He struck again and again, sometimes under the very noses of the police—and always got away.

"Well, inspector," said the commissioner, "what are you going to do about it? Hoff can't go on forever, you know!"

"We've been doing our best, commissioner. But I've a hunch we may trap him. The Seegar Piano Factory banks at the First National, and every Saturday morning they carry their pay roll in a Ford coupé out to their factory. It's on the edge of town—reached through deserted streets. I don't know why

Hoff hasn't gotten that pay roll yet. But I think he's after it. The company reported last Saturday that their coupé was followed by a high-powered roadster. Employees remember seeing the roadster in the neighborhood before. The cashier is scared and asked for police protection. Hoff may be the owner of the roadster—and then again it may only be a coincidence."

"You're watching for that roadster?" the commissioner demanded. "We mustn't overlook a single clew!"

"We are, commissioner. And we'll watch the coupé when it carries the pay roll next Saturday. Our men will be on the job—but out of sight. We don't want to scare Hoff off or out of our trap."

"Good! But remember—I want him alive!"

And Inspector Brady went out of the commissioner's office feeling that his chief's singular request for Hoff alive had made his job doubly difficult. It's not easy to spare the life of a man who's pumping lead at you. In trying to bring him down, wounded, with a shot, you may kill him. And if you let him have his head, he may kill you.

"Yes, sir," the inspector grunted to himself, "it'll take a tough man to get him alive!"

The following Saturday morning, Inspector Brady had his stage set in the neighborhood of the Seegar Piano Factory. Twenty men were thrown about the factory, some on foot and some in fast cars, all posing as loiterers.

Yet they were all handicapped. The inspector was unable to show them a photograph of Hoff. The killer had never been arrested, had no criminal record. The best he could do was furnish descriptions given by eyewitnesses of the man's past crimes. And these verbal pictures were none too good.

The men waiting for the appearance of the roadster were also on the lookout for a man with deep-set eyes and a broken nose. He was tall and spare and dressed somberly. But as to other characteristics, the color of his hair, eyes, and complexion, the manner of his walk and the sound of his voice, they had no positive information. The eyewitnesses disagreed with conviction on these telltale points.

JIM BURKE, a plain-clothes man on the inspector's staff, was one of the cordon thrown about the factory. He waited apprehensively, damning the commissioner for not giving more latitude to the cops—such as a dead-or-alive order. He and Sam Thomas, whom Hoff slaughtered, had roomed together, being bachelors. There wasn't a finer fellow in the world than Thomas—and now he was dead, killed by a rat.

The bond between Burke and Thomas went deeper than mere friendship—from the former's point of view. Burke had been with the A. E. F. overseas and a shell had laid him low between the trenches during an advance in the Argonne. He might have curled up under the fetid sun were it not for Bill Finn who braved a sniper's fire to bring him back to his own line.

Bill Finn! There was a man for you! He had taught Burke, then a youngster, something about honor and courage. These were not lacking in the detective, but when he was in France he was too busy fighting to give them much deliberate thought. But Finn, in his own offhand way, had crystallized them for him.

"Why did I fish you out of No Man's Land, Jim?" he said on a visit to the field hospital. "Search me? I guess I couldn't bear to see you dying out there—dying slowly like a stricken horse or something. I'd have shot you myself if I couldn't get you back to our lines!"

"But others saw me and knew I was alive," Burke had said. "They didn't come after me!"

"Well, I guess I couldn't ever look

at myself in a shaving mirror again, if I hadn't gone after you. You can't just let a man die a slow, agonized death without raising a hand to do something about it. I'd have never forgiven myself if I hadn't gone out to get you."

That, Burke knew, was Finn's way of making a point of honor. And though they weren't buddies till then, they became close friends after Burke's life was saved. When the war was over, the two men lost sight of each other, for Finn went West to go into an uncle's business, while Burke joined a police force in the East. They corresponded fitfully till word came that Finn had died as a result of an automobile accident.

That news left a pretty big hole in Burke's life. Though he couldn't share his days with his overseas pal, he could at least exchange thoughts with him. They reminisced by mail, and Burke lived the past and his hero worship for Finn in his letters. But that all ended with his friend's untimely death.

Then, when he was promoted to the detective bureau, Burke met up with Sam Thomas. The man was a dead ringer for Finn. Even his voice sounded like that of the man who saved his life in France. And it was not difficult for Burke, the hero worshiper, to transfer his admiration to Thomas. They became buddies, roommates, and the department called them "Damon and Pythias."

Life was full to overflowing for Burke. Daily, he had at his side the living image of the man to whom he owed his life. And there was so much in Thomas that reminded him of Finn that he sometimes regarded the former as his rescuer.

And Hoff's bullets destroyed that happy illusion!

JIM BURKE'S lips tightened with a grim bitterness as he watched the piano factory. If it would only be Hoff! If he could be the man to get the killer—alive, preserved for the chair!

Yes, he admitted to himself, he looked upon Hoff almost as Finn's slayer, too. The gangster, in killing his pal Thomas, who kept alive the memory of his war buddy, had, in a way, killed Finn.

Burke's whole being cried out for vengeance. He hated Hoff as he hated no other man. The gangster had made an empty thing of his life—by destroying forever the illusions of his dearest friends.

Inspector Brady materialized suddenly before Burke's eyes.

"Get back into that doorway, Jim!" he snapped. "We've just got word that the coupé with the pay roll left the bank. It'll be along any minute. Keep your eyes peeled for the roadster."

"Sure I will."

The inspector flashed a penetrating glance at him.

"Remember, Jim, we want Hoff alive. I know what he did to your side-kick, Sam Thomas! But you've got to put your personal grudge in your pocket. If it's your luck to take him, preserve his life as if it belonged to the President of the United States. The law'll square your account with Hoff."

"I know. If I get him, you'll have him alive—with his body all ready for the toaster."

Burke was left alone in a secluded doorway. The inspector disappeared, and the Saturday noon hour presented a scene of desolation near the piano factory save for a few cars in the seats of which sleepy men loafed, smoking.

The coupé hove in sight. Burke stared hard at it.

There was another car tailing it!

It was a high-powered roadster!

Things began to happen—with incredible, lightning speed.

As the roadster swung past the coupé a good block and a half from the police lines, a lithe figure sprang from the wheel into the roadbed, letting the car coast ahead. The man leaped on the running board of the coupé, jabbed a

black rod into the interior, and five loud reports, slightly muffled, echoed in the street. Then the man, with a small bag in his hand, returned to the roadster as the police converged, running toward him, firing.

There was a snort and a roar from the high-powered car. The driver hunched himself over the wheel and stepped on the accelerator. The machine darted forward, diving into the midst of the police, bowling over the nearest. Screams of pain and fright rang out.

The driver fired as he tore down the street and Burke saw Hoyle stroke his ribs and slowly crumple to the pavement. Hoff had another victim to his credit!

For it was Hoff! Burke glimpsed the profile of the driver. The nose was broken and the eyes were deep-set! Burke took deliberate aim and emptied his automatic at the racing machine's tires.

But luck rode with Hoff that noon. Bullets avoided him. And he dodged the police cars that swung into the road to block his path. He hopped the curb to the sidewalk, ran around a fire hydrant and the police cars and opened his exhaust, sending black clouds into their faces as he outstripped them down the street.

The inspector, beside himself with rage, organized a futile pursuit group and sent them after the killer. He had too much to answer for! The cashier was dead, the pay roll was gone, Hoyle and three other detectives were badly hurt. Hoff, whom he had virtually bottled up in a trap, was gone. Again he had outwitted the police!

Burke was not one of the pursuers. The inspector failed to include him in the detail and when the cars went off on the chase, he went over to the detective. "S'matter, Burke, did he scare you?"

"What do you mean, inspector?"

"When Hoff's car was spotted and as he attacked the coupé, the other men ran forward to surround him. You stood here like a block of wood."

Burke said nothing. He had not been frightened, but things happened so swiftly that he had not thought to run forward. Rather, he figured on covering the car with his automatic when it started off.

"It's going to take a tough man to get Hoff," the inspector sneered, "and I thought I'd picked the toughest men for this day's work."

"I hope you don't think I was afraid?" Burke grinned, holding his anger at his chief's insinuation of cowardice.

"I don't know what to think, Jim. You stood stock-still, like a cigar-store Indian!"

BURKE shrugged his shoulders, and walked away from his superior lest he display behavior unbecoming an officer. Surely Brady couldn't mean what he said. Burke's record was as good as they went on that force.

But the inspector was not through. Hoff had tricked him and he had to vent his spleen on some one. He went after Burke. "See here, Jim, don't let Thomas's death put the scare into you! I've seen it happen before. A good man sees a pal bumped off and he gets gun-shy!"

"So you think I was afraid?"

The inspector's silence to that question was sufficient answer. And the detective's heart dropped like a lead plumb into his shoes. Never had he been accused of showing the white feather. He couldn't imagine what had gotten into Brady. Turning around, he faced several of his colleagues. They must have overheard the inspector. Burke questioned their glances and they dropped their eyes. They had heard the inspector's opinion and they, too, believed it.

What was the use of explanation? Burke realized that he really had no ex-

planation to give. He was only certain that he had not thought of fear or for himself. No, he would not explain and have them think he was alibiing himself.

I'm going back to headquarters," he said stiffly to his superior, "unless you've got further orders for me!"

The inspector said that would suit him, and the detective, his feet as heavy as his heart, dragged himself away. To be called a coward was an awful thing! The enormity of the inspector's insinuation grew upon him. Just because he had not run toward Hoff's car as impulsively as the others had, he was unjustly branded. And he realized that his chief's hasty words, uttered in anger, might even drive him out of the department.

Next to his fondness for the memories of Finn and Thomas, there was nothing he cherished more than his job —his shield, which to him was a badge of honor. But he could not wear it if his fellow cops thought him yellow. That would be too much to bear!

Yes, Hoff was responsible for this unwarranted sense of degradation. It seemed to him that the killer was almost directing some malevolent influence at him. Was Hoff, the son of luck, in conspiracy with the fates to destroy him as he had destroyed five brother cops? Three killed—two bribed—all destroyed!

Hoff! Hoff! Hoff! The name shrieked itself in his ears and he had to stop a moment to catch his breath. He was overwrought. The killer was becoming an unholy obsession. Burke felt that only a meeting face to face with Hoff could rid his mind of the hatred he carried for the man with the battered nose.

The evening papers didn't spare the feelings of the police department. The story of the holdup was told with graphic detail, the opposition newspapers going so far as to intimate that Inspector Brady was culpable in the cashier's death, since he used that man as bait for his trap which, when sprung, failed to get Hoff.

Another paper, opposed to the incumbent city administration, offered a five-thousand-dollar reward for the capture of Hoff—dead or alive, pointing out that it was high time citizens took a hand in a matter the police couldn't handle.

One yellow sheet casually referred to the odd behavior of a detective who didn't jump into the fray but stood calmly by while three colleagues were shot down. Burke writhed with humiliation, knowing that it was he the paper meant. Some one had whispered the inspector's suspicions to a reporter.

AFTER supper, Burke remained on duty at headquarters, reading a magazine outside the inspector's office. He was aware that glances were directed at him. They all thought he had shown the white feather, and he could never explain that he did what he did, withholding his fire, to get at Hoff when the others failed. None would believe him.

Brady suddenly appeared in his doorway, bellowing:

"I want twenty men! We know where Hoff is!"

His eyes fell upon Burke while the other plain-clothes men were being rounded up. "You still here, Burke?"

"I'm still on the Hoff case."

"All right. Get on the band wagon." The twenty men needed crowded into Brady's office and he addressed them. "I've just got word from a stool that Hoff's hide-out is over a wharf at the foot of Carbine Street. He has another across the bay in a deserted house on Reefers' Point. I've got the harbor squad busy. We'll split forces."

He proceeded to direct Hageman, commanding eight men, to go to the house on Reefers' Point. They were to wait there till Hoff or the police showed up. The others would cover the Carbine Street wharf from the street

and the river and break in on a given signal. Two men were assigned to watch from the police launch, and Burke was sent to the speed boat.

"Four blasts on my whistle mean we're going into the wharf building," Brady went on. "Remember you're to hold your fire. We want Hoff alive. If you have to shoot, cripple him, but don't let daylight through him. If he makes a get-away by the river, let him go—for he'll make for the house of Reefers' Point."

"Suppose he don't go there, inspector?" one man suggested.

"He will—if I've got my dope straight. It's his arsenal. And his loot is supposed to be cached there. He'll be running right into our arms, too."

The inspector's men piled out of headquarters into police automobiles. Hageman's outfit started for Reefers' Point—Brady's for the wharf and Burke's for a pier three blocks south of Carbine Street where the police boats would pick them up.

On the darkened pier, Burke separated from the pair detailed to the launch and took a seat in the speed boat beside an old friend, Lem Craig. They slid into the black, velvety river, proceeding to the designated wharf as noiselessly as possible. The sky was overcast, and gray clouds hung low, but, far above, the moon was trying to make its nocturnal début. Burke prayed that Brady had the right steer from his stool pigeon. He wanted to meet Hoff ever so badly—to be the man who got him!

The Carbine Street wharf loomed ominously before them. They couldn't see the lightless launch or any sign of life on the wharf. Burke reached for the searchlight just in front of Craig.

"Don't monkey with it," Craig said, "it's all set to go on. Just one press on the button and you'll have diamond light!"

"I want to know where the damn button is," Burke whispered. "He may pop out in a fast boat like a bat out of hell."

"You know these boats, Burke. You've been on them before."

"Don't I know! Two years on harbor duty. It's a lousy life."

"Too wet for you?" Craig chuckled.

"Yeah, too wet."

BURKE started. He thought he heard a noise under the wharf twenty yards away. Perhaps it was just the water lapping against the piles. A breeze had sprung up and there was a running river a hundred yards offshore.

Minutes ticked themselves into eternity. There was no further sound from the wharf, no signal from Brady, no sign of the launch. Burke hoped the moon would remain shrouded in clouds. The blanketing darkness helped to deceive Hoff if he was on the wharf, if he was planning a get-away to Reefers' Point. It hid the police on the river from the killer.

Brady's whistle cut through the heavy silence. Four quick blasts! There was a crash on the street side of the wharf! The doors were down! The inspector's outfit was in the building!

Burke could hear the thumping of running, searching feet. The wharf echoed with the sounds of the raid.

A roar, a spluttering roar! Then a boat shot from beneath the piles. Burke could only hear it, but couldn't see it. He laid a cautioning hand on Craig, who was tense at the throttle. He wanted Hoff to get into the river before betraying their presence. But the launch turned on its long beam of white light, smashing Burke's boat with a flood of it.

A hail of shot came out of the darkness from Hoff. Two pieces of his lead nicked Burke's gunwales. Burke let his light go and Craig's boat leaped forward.

They picked Hoff up with the white beam. He was in a boat of similar design, sleek and fast. The evenly pitted

crafts were opened up to full speed and the fifty yards between them never varied. The launch was quickly outdistanced by the roaring speed boats.

Burke could barely discern Hoff hunched over his wheel, hunched like a racing car driver, bent on outstripping his closest competitor. The moon came out when they were well down-stream, entering the bay. Far off, the detective made out the dim outline of the lonely point. It raced toward them, and soon the dark, blind windows of the deserted house near the water's edge were winking at them.

Hoff was making for a landing stage in front of the house. Burke shouted to Craig to slow down. He wanted to let Hoff land and walk into Brady's trap. He wanted to get the killer himself—but orders were orders. Moreover, he was covering the killer from the river and didn't want to run into police bullets should there be a skirmish on the water's edge.

As Burke switched off the searchlight, the moon vanished behind a cloud. The water became inky again and Hoff was invisible. Now only his retreating motor could be heard. Craig followed, his own motor purring softly. There was a scraping of wood and they knew Hoff had landed on the stage. He was going up to the house.

They waited with bated breath. Minutes seemed longer than hours in a death watch. No sound came from the house. Burke dared not betray their closeness to the landing stage by using the searchlight.

"I can see the other boat, moored," he whispered to Craig. "Can you get alongside? I'll get into the boat and cut it loose. That'll cut off Hoff's retreat by water."

"I'll try."

"If you hear a sound on the shore, drift away. I'll handle him from the boat."

"O. K., Burke."

THEIR whispered colloquy brought them gliding beside Hoff's speed boat. Burke swung into it nimbly and clambered to the bow where the mooring rope was fastened. Evidently Hoff thought he had thrown off his pursuers and felt safe in the vicinity of his hide-out. The mooring was a fast one.

There was a shout near the house. Then a shot.

The patter of running feet neared the landing stage.

"Shove off!" Burke said hoarsely and he quickly pushed Craig's craft into the river.

Hoff's speed boat was a four-seater, two in front at the wheel behind a windshield that kept spray off the driver, and two in the stern, covered with a tarpaulin. Burke got out his gun and dived under the tarpaulin as a man leaped upon the landing stage.

There was a fusillade from the house. Burke heard a police bullet, fired wildly in the dark, zip through the canvas near his ear. Some one landed feet first in the boat. The engine was turned over and the craft veered into the running river.

Burke was about to throw back the tarpulin and cover Hoff, whom he could see at the wheel, when the beam from Craig's searchlight flooded the hunched back. Again, there was a fusillade from the shore, the police having a lighted mark to fire at.

Hoff turned in his seat and fired over the detective's hidden head directly at the light, taking care with his aim. As Burke ducked, he heard a scream and saw the beam of white light soar upward into the hazy heavens. Hoff had gotten Lem Craig.

Then they were out in the river, out in the bay. The water was choppy and the boat bobbed like a skimmed flatstone, the throttle wide open. Burke knew that if they hit a piece of driftwood, all would be over but the shouting. The

speed boat would fold up like a crushed match box.

A clanging buoy sounded above the roar of the motor. Burke knew it for the bell and light marker over Reefers' Rock, a menace to navigation in the middle of the bay. Some day, the war department promised, it would be removed forever.

Hoff was headed for the buoy. That puzzled Burke. Could it be that the killer was making for the open sea—for some rum runner beyond the twelve-mile limit? Reefers' Rock stood in the roadstead to the sea.

He quietly slipped above his canvas hiding place, brought his gun out and leaned forward. Hoff's back was all he could see. The buoy was clamoring wildly and winking its red eye almost beside him.

He rammed the gun into the killer's back. "Slow down, Hoff!" he shouted in the helmsman's ear. "I've got you covered."

Hoff started, then laughed without turning around. He didn't reduce his speed. Burke shouted to him again.

Too late, the detective realized what was happening. Hoff had brought the boat around, aiming for the bounding buoy. He meant to crash it—to take his chances swimming in the bay.

Burke and Hoff stood up as one man. The detective dared not shoot the killer. Orders were orders. The red eye of the clanging buoy leaped at them. They couldn't miss it now.

Hoff jumped. Burke saw him vanish into the black water. Then he jumped, too, knowing the trick of leaping from a racing speed boat. He saw the eggshell craft fold up on the iron sides of the buoy in a burst of yellow flame, just as the waters of the bay closed over him.

When he came to the surface, he took a few lusty strokes and reached the side of the buoy. There were mooring loops on it and he found them, using them to help him to climb up beneath the bell. The bedlam created by the iron clapper was deafening. There was no sight of Hoff.

BURKE knew what he must do. He was stranded and there was a way to attract attention. The Reefers' Rock buoy was a sea-marker, and if it was silenced it would attract the attention of those used to its incessant ringing. Quickly, he stripped off his coat and with his necktie bound it about the iron tongue, muffling its strokes when it beat against the dome of the bell. The sudden silence was ghastly beneath the red, glowing eye of the light.

A cry came up from the water. Burke saw Hoff swimming weakly toward the buoy. He reached down and caught at the killer's wrists when they came within grasp. With effort and little help from Hoff, he dragged the man from the bay and without a second thought locked his arms around an iron post with handcuffs. Hoff was a tricky customer, and he was safer trussed up.

"Well, you got me!" Hoff muttered weakly. "I thought I could swim for it—but that jump from the boat—got my wind."

"I've got you all right—even if it was a lucky break."

"I'm all tied up—ready for the toaster. And you pick off the five-grand reward." Hoff laughed bitterly.

Hoff's voice stirred the detective oddly. He knelt beside his prisoner and turned him over, looking into his face.

"God! Bill—Bill Finn!"

The killer's mouth was agape. "Jim—Jim Burke."

"I—I thought you were—dead, Bill."

Hoof's eyes lighted with hope. "What a break for me! So it is you, Jim! I'm mighty, mighty glad to see you——"

"And you're Hoff! But I thought they said you were killed——"

"In an automobile accident." Hoff winked. "Sure. I wanted them to think that. They were wise to me. So Bill

Finn died in a smash-up. I don't know who the bloke was they identified—and I came East."

"As Hoff the killer! You got a busted nose. No wonder I didn't recognize you before."

"We won't go into that, Jim. Business is business," Hoff said lightly. "And you're the copper that got me! This sure is my lucky day."

Burke sat down weakly. "Well, it surely isn't mine."

"Come, slip these bracelets off, Jim. They're cutting my frozen mitts."

"Sorry, Bill, but you're a prisoner—a badly wanted murderer."

"What? Say, you're not going to turn an old buddy over to your flatfooted brothers?" Hoff spoke scoffingly, doubtfully.

"It's my duty, Bill." Burke inwardly cursed the day he ever heard of Hoff, the killer—Hoff, the killer of his pal, Thomas—Sam Thomas who stood for all that was fine in Bill Finn, his war buddy.

"Duty—hell!" Hoff sneered. "You can't send me to the chair. You know what we were to each other once."

Burke nodded. "I remember. I wish I didn't!"

"You can't send me to the chair, Jim. I pulled you out of a shell hole back in France——"

"I haven't forgotten you saved my life——"

"And you owe me mine now, Jim."

"This is different, Bill. We're on different sides of the fence."

Hoff sneered contemptuously. "Go on! Give me a sermon. You stand for law and order and I'm the hunted outlaw. Well, I'm making no apologies for what I've done. I've taken my chances—and I think—luck is still with me." He watched the detective shrewdly. Burke's face was contorted with agony.

"Come on, Jim, take off the bracelets. I won't hurt you. Listen, this'll be easy. No one will ever know you had me trussed up. I've got my wind back now and I can swim ashore. I've swum out to this buoy before. Just let me slip away and no one'll be any the wiser."

"How about me, Bill? You've killed my best friend. I'm sworn to get you, to bring you in."

"There's five grand in it for you if you take off the bracelets, Jim. That'll make up for your loss of the reward. I always keep my word."

Burke shook his head. "Nothing doing."

"Ten, then. I'll make it twenty grand, Jim. I've got plenty of coin soaked away." Hoff's voice took on a pleading note. "I never go back on a promise."

"Blood money. I don't want it."

Hoff grew angry. "Say, Jim, I saved your life. You owe me mine now—and it won't cost you anything to give it to me. I can't face the chair. Anything but that! Life is more important than your damned duty!"

"You're my prisoner."

Hoff remained silent a long time, studying his captor.

"All right, Jim, if you feel that way about it. I won't beg you again. But think of me and what I did for you! Think of me then, taking that last walk from the cell to the rubber mat in front of the hot squat. Have you ever sent a man to the chair before—a buddy of yours?"

BURKE stared out over the inky waters. He wished they'd sweep over the buoy and swallow him up. He wouldn't fight for his life. Fate was most surely playing him a dirty trick!

"I won't beg you again to let me go," Hoff went on, "But I do ask one favor of you: Put a bullet in me. Kill me here and chuck the body overboard. I can't face the chair. I always said I'd kill myself before I let the cops send

me to the death house. That's all I ask of you, Jim."

Burke was thinking fast. It would be easy. He owed a lot to Hoff—more than his life! The man stood for ideals he held. And he didn't want Hoff, who was Bill Finn, to suffer that last walk to the electric chair. He could end the man's misery and at the same time clear Hoff's debt to society. He could do then and there what the State would do at a later date and with greater mental torture. He could kill Hoff—and no one need be any the wiser!

Hoff continued his pleadings. He was afraid of being put to death. His one hope had always been for a swift, sudden death in a gun fight. Jim could do it just as easily.

Burke shook his head slowly and painfully. It was throbbing with the shrieks of a million tempting demons. Hoff was a killer. He was wanted alive. But once he saved Burke's own life. That debt cut no ice with the detective now. But he hated to see an old friend put through the torture of execution—though he wasn't squeamish about capital punishment. He believed in it—but never before faced the problem of submitting a pal to it.

He brought his gun out and pressed the trigger. A shot rang out. The water hadn't affected it. He could still do Hoff—Bill Finn—a good turn.

Hoff looked into his eyes and grinned. Then he turned and lay prone on the iron deck of the buoy, waiting for the fatal shot. Jim wouldn't fail him on this last request. Quick death now—not weeks of torture later! He waited and wondered. "Hurry, Jim. I can't hold my nerve much longer!"

"Sit up!" Burke commanded. Hoff obeyed. "Face the other way!"

When Hoff presented his back to him, Burke thought quickly. He shifted the gun in his hand and brought the butt down with a crack on the killer's skull. Hoff slumped to the deck with a groan.

"Now—now he won't mind waiting till help comes," Burke murmured. "And I won't be hearing his pleading voice, tempting me to be the sort of a guy he wouldn't have wanted me to be back in France. Duty sure is hell sometimes!"

In the early hours of the morning, Burke delivered his prisoner to Inspector Brady at headquarters. The muffled buoy and his shot had attracted the police launch. And in the course of questioning Hoff, it came out that the killer and the cop were once war buddies, that Bill Finn had saved Burke's life in the trenches.

Brady grunted, smiling sadly at Burke who was limp with the emotion of his odious job. "It sure was a tough break for you, Jim. But you did your duty as few might have done it. You could have let Hoff swim for it and we'd have never known. Well, I always said it would take a hard and tough man to get Hoff."

"Yeah," Hoff grinned, "hard and tough—and in more ways than one. You got to be that way to be honest!"

Burke winced though he knew his war buddy's words were meant for a compliment.

A new story by Sean O'Larkin will appear in a coming issue.

The GET-AWAY

By WALTER McLEOD

He Was Ready. There Were a Few Vital Seconds to Go——

WHEN Max Hoffner, the lawyer, threw on the polished surface of Creed's mahogany table, the new passport and the envelope that contained the steamer tickets, Martin Creed's crafty eyes lit up and the impassive dignity that was his chief stock in trade fell from him.

"There you are," said Hoffner with a slight sneer. *"Ile de France*—sailing at midnight."

Creed glanced eagerly at the delicate porcelain clock on the mantel. Nine o'clock—three hours more. He tore open the envelope with carefully manicured fingers that trembled with a nervousness he strove to conceal.

"You brought the car, Max?" he asked anxiously.

"Yeah, sure. It's outside," said the lawyer, and his shifty eyes took in the other's worry with slightly amused contempt. "You're shaken up all right, Creed," sneered Hoffner.

"I don't want anything to happen at the last minute," said Creed, collecting himself. He lit a cigarette. Once again he was the handsome, well-preserved man of forty-five with the suavity of manner that had enabled him to sell so many hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of dud stock to unsuspicious people who had not read aright the message of his crafty eyes and hard-lipped mouth.

"Nothing will happen provided you ——" Hoffner paused. "Got a drink?" he asked.

Creed glanced at him curiously. Then he walked across the room to a cupboard and produced a bottle of Scotch and glasses. He poured two drinks and only when he proffered a glass to the lawyer did the ripples on the surface of the liquid betray the tension under his calm exterior. He glanced again at the clock.

"You're nervous," said Hoffner. "Snap out of it."

Creed smiled airily, sipping his drink. "Why should I be nervous?" he lied. "It's all set!"

"Oh, yeah?" questioned the lawyer.

"What's the idea? I've paid you for your services just as we agreed."

"Yeah?"

"What d' you mean? I left a check for ten thousand at your office this morning."

"Sit down an' listen," Hoffner told him, seating himself at the mahogany table and fingering the stem of his glass.

"Damn it!" Creed protested haughtily. "I've just three hours to get into New York and over to the pier. We can talk in the car if there's anything important you've got to say to me. I can't waste time now."

"Sit down!" There was a sharper note of command in Hoffner's voice. Creed looked at him curiously and, shrugging his shoulders, he sat down and faced him across the table.

"Hurry up and say what you've got to say," he snapped.

"Listen," said Hoffman, "you left a measly ten grand for me this morning."

Creed nodded. "Your retainer fee. That was right, wasn't it? You're to be my mouth in case anything slips."

"That was right," said the lawyer. "But you must have taken me for a sucker, Creed."

"I don't follow you."

"You don't follow me," mimicked the other. "Well, follow this. When you got into that jam you came straight to me and spilled your guts. But you didn't tell all the facts."

"I don't know what you're driving at."

"This." Hoffner sat back in his chair and narrowed his eyes. "Ten grand isn't enough for my services—now. Or to keep me quiet! I found out all there was to know about you an' that was plenty. You've been on this bum stock proposition for ten years. Ten years ago my mother lost the only ten thousand she ever had on one of your rotten deals. You got away with it till Cruikshank saw through you. He called your bluff. You killed him."

CREED shivered. "Quit that," he said sharply. Then he looked around at the clock. "I don't know what you're getting at."

"That's simple. A hundred grand or I turn you in! Before you killed Cruikshank you'd cleaned him out of at least five hundred thousand—a half million dollars."

"What about it?" Creed was tapping nervously on the table top; his eyes riveted on Hoffner's.

"I told you. A hundred grand as the price of keeping you out of the chair. You can spare it!"

Creed flinched. He rested his chin in his hand. "As the price of keeping your mouth shut," he said. "That's what you mean?"

"You heard me!"

Creed, with a forced smile on his thin lips and an uneasy look in his wrinkled eyes, reached across the table toward the silver cigarette box. "Let's think this over. Have a cigarette, Max," he said pleasantly, and lifted the lid.

Max Hoffner watched him with the fingers of both hands pressed down on the polished table top. His eyes were on Creed's outstretched left arm as he selected a cigarette.

"Now, you dirty rat!" Creed's gray

eyes blazed, and down by his side, clenched in his right hand, Hoffner saw the circle of steel at the end of an automatic muzzle.

"Stick your hands up!" Creed snarled, and Hoffner heaved up his overcoated arms slowly until his hands were level with his shoulders. The lawyer's face was dead-white. Creed walked around the table and fumbled at the other's clothing. He pulled out a small revolver and tossed it on the table.

"It's no use, Creed," Hoffner stammered. "You might as well pay. If you kill me, I've left papers. The police'll know. It'll be easier to pay; an' you can afford it."

"Listen, mutt," Creed said in harsh, clipped tones. "In two hours or so I'll be out on the Atlantic. Nobody could hurt me. I could dump your body in the back of the car and drop it over in the marshes somewhere on the way in. It would be weeks before it would be found. There wasn't a half a million in it nor nothing like it," Creed continued. "You wouldn't believe that though. I've got just enough to keep me—not a nickel more."

"You're lying, Creed." Hoffner licked his dry lips.

"Listen," said Creed. "Only once in my life did I ever kill a man and that was Cruikshank." The muscles around his mouth twitched. "I'd made up my mind it was the first and last time. I wouldn't kill except as a last resource—that it was an absolute necessity to save my own skin. See? I never lost my head yet, but the more I think about it the more I think that this is the second time it will be necessary to kill. Get me?"

Hoffner clenched and unclenched his fingers, for his hands were becoming numbed. He lowered them six inches.

"Drop your hands," said Creed suddenly. "I don't want any more murder on my conscience. In five days I'll be in Paris with a new identity and enough money to keep me the rest of my life. I don't have to worry about you, see?"

Creed put his hand in his pocket and drew out a wallet. He counted out notes on the table with sharp, nervous flicks. "Here," he said harshly, "here's another ten grand. I don't need to give it to you. It might be better to shoot you. You ought to consider yourself lucky."

Hoffner rose. He picked up the notes hurriedly and thrust them into his pocket. "Give me a drink, Creed," he begged. "I'm all shaken up."

"Go, go!" Creed shouted and his body shook all over. The pistol weaved around in his shaking hand as he thrust it at Hoffner. "Get out!" he shouted again. "Get out before I kill you."

As the dining-room door closed on the figure of the lawyer Creed sank back in his chair. With difficulty he poured himself a glass of whisky and drained it. So far nothing he had drunk had affected him in the slightest degree.

HE tried to rouse himself. He remembered the car out in the roadway—the car which would take him to New York. In two hours or so he would be clear of everything—right away from the accusing faces of his victims who had filled his pockets from little hoards of savings, and who had provided the money which would now keep him in comparative luxury in Paris for the rest of his life. Away from the parchment face of old Cruikshank lying dead in his own study.

Damn Hoffner, the dirty shyster! Why should he start something now at the last minute? Creed's nerves were already at the breaking point. It had been easy to filch money from people, but the murder had shaken him.

He looked at the clock and rose from the chair. He shook himself as though to shake off the fears that crowded into his brain. He walked out to the doorway of the house and looked down the drive. He saw against the bars of the

gate the black outline of the car. A wild relief surged through him, spurred by the cold night air. Two trunks—two trips out to the car and then away. Paris!

Reëntering the house he ran up the stairs. He dragged the first trunk from his bedroom. With awkward steps he carried it down the first flight of the staircase. Out on the roadway he could hear the steady roar of the automobile traffic and the hooting of impatient motorists. In five minutes he would be out there speeding for New York.

In the dark hallway the silence struck him as he paused to rest. He heard a sound out at the gate—the *clank* of the small gateway at the side. His heart stopped beating for an instant. Hoffner again? What would he do? Had he squealed?

He heard footsteps on the gravel of the driveway. He stood rooted to the floor, his hand on the railing, his heart throbbing madly. He should have killed Hoffner. It would have been sure then. He had killed once, he could do it just once more. No, he couldn't. That had been the trouble. He had wanted to kill the lawyer and shut his mouth forever. He hadn't the nerve to kill again.

Thoughts came racing through his mind in the few moments it took the person outside to reach the door. Creed's hand was clasped on the automatic in his pocket. Slowly he drew it out and held it pointing toward the door. The hallway was dark. Moonbeams streamed through the windows and made patterns on the smooth floor of the hall.

Rat-a-tat! Rat-a-tat-tat!

The metallic clangor of the door knocker rang through the empty hall. Creed remembered that the door was not closed. He had left it unlatched. Petrified with fright he saw the door open slowly and outlined against the moonlight he picked out the figure which peered in. In a despairing flash he recognized the shape of a policeman's cap.

As he stood on the verge of collapse a gust of wind came through the open door. The dining-room door swung open and threw a shaft of light on a red face and blue uniform—a burly figure that blocked the way to the car on the road and freedom.

Creed's finger, crooked around the trigger of the automatic, contracted involuntarily. There was a loud crash and a spurt of orange flame. In the dim light Creed saw, as in a slow-motion moving picture, the look of surprise on the red face. He saw the man glance down at his chest as his two hands came up with outstretched fingers. He saw the man crumple and fall.

Paralyzed with fear Creed saw the fallen figure suddenly lift one arm. The policeman had snatched out his gun. A shot rang out even as Creed was raising his own automatic again.

Creed's knees buckled like the jointed knees of a doll. A blue-black, round spot had suddenly appeared in the center of his forehead. He fell heavily forward and his limp arms strangely made no effort to protect his face.

Patrolman O'Brien pushed his two-hundred pounds back against the wall. Creed's shot had got him high in the left shoulder. He could hear running footsteps coming up onto the porch. The driver of the police car had heard the shooting.

O'Brien looked up weakly as the driver entered, revolver in hand. He spoke with difficulty. "Would you belave it—the murdherin' divil. The dirrty rat to try to bump me off whin I comes in pacefullike to give him a ticket. He can't parrk a car outside the whole night t'rough."

The driver bent over Creed. "You gave him his ticket all right, O'Brien," he said grimly. "A ticket to hell."

Walter McLeod is a regular contributor to this magazine.

NEW PLACES *and* NEW FRIENDS

By James Worth

I AM sympathetically interested in your problems. I am here to help those who wish to uproot themselves and strike out for new places and new ways of making a living—invalids who would like to learn about healthier climes; vacationists, tourists, and travelers who are perplexed about routes, rates, and time; campers, hunters, trappers, and hardy souls who want to seek adventure.

Your letters of inquiry will be welcomed and answered at once. When possible, I shall also be glad to put you in touch with other readers who can supply added information. I will help you, too, through correspondence, to make friends with readers of the same sex. Your letters will be forwarded direct when you so desire; otherwise they will be answered here.

To obtain information about new places, or to make new friends, write James Worth, care of the Popular Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York. A self-addressed, stamped envelope will bring a prompt reply.

ACROSS THE CONTINENT

On the Broadway of America

SUMMER time is motoring time. When the balmy, sunny days come around, there is an irresistible urge in the breast of every motorist to explore some beckoning white road to its unknown and romantic end.

Many of our readers are evidently considering transcontinental treks, for recently we have received a number of requests, asking us to recommend the best coast-to-coast highway. Therefore we are glad to answer the following let-

ter here, so that all readers who are planning such motor trips may share this road information.

DEAR MR. WORTH: I am one of those chaps with a vagabond turn of mind, always ready to pack up the old knapsack, step on the gas, and make tracks for new places. This summer I am going to motor from New York City to San Diego, California, and would like you to tell me the best way to go.

Naturally, I want the shortest route, the most scenic route, and the route with the most paving. This sounds like a large order, but I am sure you can fill it.

I'm particularly interested in getting a glimpse of the Southwest, which has always fascinated me, and am wondering if it would be too hot to take a route traversing that part of the United States. What do you think? Of course, if I followed such a route I would expect to cross over the border and see at least one city in old Mexico.

If you will describe in some detail the route you suggest, I shall be most grateful to you.

ALBERT F.

New York City.

We would suggest that Albert F. make his transcontinental trek over the Broadway of America. Starting under the white lights of gay Broadway, this highway will take him across eleven States and the District of Columbia en route to the old Spanish city of San Diego on the shores of the Pacific. Of its three thousand four hundred and thirty-seven miles, eighty-two per cent is paved. The remainder of the route is all graveled and the graveled portion is being oiled rapidly.

It is said that the Broadway of America is no warmer in the summer than any other transcontinental route. Along the Eastern part of the journey, where rains are frequent, graveled and paved roads will assure Albert F. that there will be no delays. On the Western end of the route, the dry climate with a minimum of rainfall precludes any possibility of being held up by muddy roads or any dangers from driving over slick mountain trails. For in this part of the country the route runs at easy grades or across long, level stretches of country with no mountain grades and winding roads to travel.

The slogan of this highway is: "Do your scenery shopping on the Broadway of America," and it's easy to obey this suggestion. No highway offers the tourist more in scenic attractions and historic interest than this transcontinental trail.

From New York the route runs through the densely populated cities of New Jersey to Philadelphia, where one may live again the stirring days of our early colonial history. Then on to Washington, the nation's capital, a city beloved by every loyal American.

Leaving Washington, the route leads through the heart of the Old Dominion State, down through the famous and historic Shenandoah Valley, through the Shenandoah National Park to Tennessee, where it crosses the State line at Bristol.

On paved highway, the tourist speeds along through the scenic Cumberland Mountains, through Knoxville to Nashville, the capital of the State. From Nashville the highway leads to Memphis, built along the shores of the Father of Waters. At this point it crosses the river into Arkansas.

Across this rich and fertile State the route goes by way of Little Rock and Hot Springs. At the latter place the first national park was created by the government. Here are many wonderful hotels. Leaving Hot Springs, the highway reaches the Texas line at Texarkana.

From Texarkana the road crosses the largest State in the Union by way of Dallas and Fort Worth to El Paso. Through Texas, Albert F. will follow historic trails over splendid motor highways. Here the buffalo once roamed the plains. Here pioneers struggled and fought to carve frontier homes from the wilderness. And here are trails over which the famous longhorn steers of the

Lone Star State were driven by singing cowboys to market. Nor has the old West entirely vanished, for on this lap of his journey, Albert F. may still see cowboys riding the range.

Over the vast expanse of Texas the motorist speeds along over paved highways past rich farm land, across broad plains, past grazing country and oil fields, through desert lands and along mountain ranges, until he reaches the irrigated Valley of the Rio Grande at El Paso.

At this city Albert F. will have a chance to cross into Mexico and visit Juarez, which lies just across the border. This is a modern city with the customs of the old days preserved. Here Albert F. may see the ancient mission, visit modern cafés and cabarets, see bull fights, and many other interesting sights.

Leaving El Paso, the route crosses the lowest snow-free pass in the Rocky Mountains. In fact, with no steep grades to climb, the tourist glides along over paved roads without realizing that he is crossing a mountain pass. In a few moments he is in New Mexico rolling along between green alfalfa and cotton fields, with the Rio Grande not far away, until he reaches Las Cruces, a beautiful valley city at the foot of the Organ Mountains.

From this point, Albert F. will ride across the desert on improved roads until he reaches Deming. A short distance farther and Lordsburg is reached. Here the route swings again to the south to Douglas, Arizona, where another Mexican city, Agua Pieta, invites one to cross the border.

From Douglas the route turns northwesterly and winds on through Bisbee and the famous old town of Tombstone to Tucson, another city of the Southwest with many scenic and historic attractions. Through this part of the country the desert is covered with a wide variety of desert plant life, such as the giant cactus. From Tucson, the route leads through Florence to Phoenix, the wide-awake capital of Arizona.

Leaving Phoenix, the route goes to Yuma, and from there, on an all-paved road, across the California desert, and then makes its way to San Diego, on the shores of the Pacific.

We are telling Albert F. where to write for additional information and a road map of the Broadway of America, and we shall be glad to supply the same address to any other interested readers.

THE MAGNOLIA GARDENS

One of the Beauty Spots of the Old South

THE subject of gardens is one that has not been introduced in this department before, but we are glad of an opportunity to tell something about a spot which ranks along with the Grand Canyon of Colorado and Niagara Falls, as a unique and rare sight not to be missed by any one in search of beauty.

DEAR MR. WORTH: I am wondering if you will give some space in your interesting department to a reader with a passion for gardens? In my travels over this continent and Europe I have visited many rare and beautiful gardens, such as the Boboli at Florence, the Cinnamon Gardens at Colombo, and those of Versailles. However, I have never seen the famous Magnolia Gardens of South Carolina, which I am told are unsurpassed for beauty. I am planning a trip to Charleston to see them, and would appreciate any information which you can give me.

MRS. T. P. D.

Washington, D. C.

The celebrated Magnolia Gardens are located about fifteen miles outside Charleston on the Ashley River, and are visited every year by thousands of tourists. If Mrs. T. P. D. wishes to see them at their best, she should make her journey there either in April, when the azaleas are in bloom, or in May when the magnolias are in blossom.

We prophesy that, as a lover of gar-

dens, Mrs. T. P. D. has a wonderful experience in store for her, for no gardens in Europe that we know of or have seen compare in beauty with this garden of the old South.

Here one wanders through a wilderness brilliant with gorgeous masses of color, or stands beside a dark pool guarded by giant oaks, trailing festoons of purple wistaria and gray Spanish moss. This garden is twenty-five acres of enchanted loveliness, and we recommend it enthusiastically to all garden lovers among our readers.

Nor should any one visit historic old Charleston without making a trip to the Middleton Place Gardens, the oldest landscaped gardens in America, also located on the Ashley River outside the city.

The fame of these gardens has been widespread for generations, for even before the Revolution the gardens of Mr. Middleton of Carolina were noted in England. Time has mellowed the loveliness of the formal terraces, the walks and ornamental waters, as well as enhanced the historical significance of the spot.

Another beauty spot recently opened to the public in the vicinity of Charleston is the Cypress Gardens, twenty-four miles north of the city. These gardens consist of a water forest of giant cypress trees, a strange and lovely sight.

Here one may paddle in boats over mysterious waterways or walk for miles on paths and dikes through the silence of the forest, the natural beauty of which has been left untouched. Along the paths rare flowers and shrubs have been planted, making gay spots of color in contrast to the somber trees and onyx waters.

Visitors often compare these gardens to such natural wonders as the redwood groves of California, to which tree this variety of cypress is related.

We shall be glad to tell any readers interested in gardens where more information about these three beauty spots of South Carolina may be obtained. We would also welcome letters for publication in this department from readers telling of famous gardens which they have visited.

HAVE YOU A VACATION PROBLEM?

The great outdoors is calling loudly these warm summer days, and offices and cities are being abandoned for seashore, country, and forest. Some of our readers are planning carefree vagabond vacations, and for such as these we have collected information relative to auto trailers, camp outfits, and supplies.

Others have bought or leased camp sites in the heart of the forest or by the side of the sea, and would like to know how to build a log cabin and how to furnish it. This information we will gladly give.

Still others have not made up their minds as to where they would like to spend their vacations, and we shall be glad to make suggestions along this line.

Address all letters relative to vacation problems to James Worth, in care of The Popular Magazine.

HEAVY CRIME

WELL, we've heard of just about every kind of crime imaginable, or we thought we had until just now. Beat this one if you can. A couple of Chicago thieves—they must be giants—went skipping off the other day with two tons of lead! There were ninety bars of the metal, worth over four hundred dollars, and a smelting concern was the victim. These two yeggs are doing things on a big scale. Chicago had better keep an eye on the street cars and L trains. Some one will cart off the Loop some night!

AND IN OUR NEXT—

BILL HALL walked into the main room of the Senate press gallery, leaving the chattering telegraph instruments of the wire services and telegraph companies at the long entrance of the gallery.

Mechanically his feet took him toward the bulletin board on the right wall, next to the entrance into the press seats that overhang the vice president's rostrum of the chamber itself.

"This is a fine time for you to show up," the gallery superintendent declared. "Wonder that Intercontinental Press has been able to serve its clients at all with their Senate star just getting on the job."

* * * *

WALKING out to where his operator sat in the little railed-off office, Bill leaned over. "Tom," he said in a low voice, *"flash!"* Outwardly there was nothing in the actions of either Bill or his telegraph man to denote that they were the least bit excited. Tom Paine grasped his key and the sounder chattered a few times.

Both these men knew that, when the word *"flash"* had come over in press code, everything had promptly stopped dead in the office downtown. The battery of high-speed printers had halted, probably midway in sentences. In New York, San Francisco, all over the United States and Canada now, things were at dead center in the newspaper offices of all the Intercontinental Press clients, waiting for Bill Hall to speak.

In a low voice Bill dictated in his operator's ear:

"SENATOR DAVID HARTSON WAS FOUND MURDERED IN HIS OFFICE IN THE SENATE OFFICE BUILDING AT 10:45 THIS MORNING."

THE stirring bits you have just read are from "The Senate Mystery," the big feature full-length novel which will lead off the September issue of this Street & Smith magazine, The Popular.

The author is Captain Leighton H. Blood, famous now for his superb stories of the Foreign Legion. For one issue, Captain Blood turns his attention from the legion to Washington, D. C., for he knows that city and the inside life of it as well as you know your home town. Better, perhaps, because Captain Blood is a newspaper man as well as a soldier, and has served in the Senate press gallery.

He has met in their unofficial moments all the celebrities you read about in your daily newspaper. He has smoked and chatted casually with presidents, vice presidents, cabinet members, senators, representatives, committeemen, and a host of other people who compose the gigantic machinery of our government.

A Washington mystery novel by such a man could not fail to be intensely interesting. Without being indiscreet, unpatriotic, or unpleasantly sensational, Captain Blood has nevertheless written a story that is peculiarly exciting and revealing—a novel that ranks among the best we have ever published. "The Senate Mystery" will be on the news stands on August 5th. Have your dealer reserve it now.

Other excellent features in that number will be—a new big story about "Slim" Evans, the "dumbest flyer in the Border Patrol," by Thomson Burtis, who has come to be known as one of the foremost humorists in the writing field; and new stories by new and old favorites —Lieut. Seymour G. Pond, William Hemmingway, Peter Landis, and others.

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The most complete array of stellar talent in fiction to appear together in any magazine.

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Two stupendous issues for exacting readers of fine fiction.

The August 1st Number

FOR VALOR

By Robert Carse

A dashing story of the Foreign Legion and a great soldier who wouldn't play the game.

IT'LL BE JUSTICE

By Hal Dunning

A dynamic novel of Jim-twin Allen, the best-loved outlaw in the West.

MENACE OF THE TINY GOD

By Nels Leroy Jorgensen

A strange story of human hates and passions in the wilds of Indo-China.

Also A-1 short stories by Jack Hulick, Wright Van Deusen, C. S. Montanye, and others.

ALL STORIES COMPLETE IN EVERY ISSUE

The August 15th Number

SAVAGE

By James Clarke

Indians and voodooism—strange rites in the depths of the jungle—a titanic flood; in this stirring tale of the Everglades.

HIS LAST JOB

By H. Bedford-Jones

Pearls and Death in a unique novelette of real adventure.

Added to this constellation are Herman Landon, Bertrand Sinclair, Jack Hulick, Karl W. Detzer, and Charles Wesley Sanders, to make this a Complete all-star cast.

Read COMPLETE STORIES Twice a month

Of course CAMELS are milder
THEY'RE FRESH!

HAVE you noticed how women everywhere are switching to the fresh mildness of Camels? Always a great favorite with the ladies, this famous blend is more popular now than ever, since the introduction of the new Humidor Pack.

If you need to be convinced, make this simple test yourself between a humidor fresh Camel and any other cigarette:

First, inhale the cool fragrant smoke of a perfectly conditioned Camel and note how easy it is to the throat.

Next, inhale the hot, brackish smoke of a parched dry cigarette and feel that sharp stinging sensation on the membrane.

The air-sealed Humidor Pack keeps all the rare flavor and aroma in and prevents the precious natural tobacco moisture from drying out. Important too, it protects the cigarette from dust and germs.

Switch to Camel freshness and mildness for one whole day, then leave them —if you can.

● *It is the mark of a considerate hostess, by means of the Humidor Pack, to "Serve a fresh cigarette." Buy Camels by the carton — this cigarette will remain fresh in your home and office*

CAMELS

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